'Commoner than water, crueller than truth': Six Latin narratives of religious conversion.

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"Commoner than water, crueller than truth"

Six Latin narratives of religious conversion

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Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy

University of Wales Swansea

2002

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

There was a saviour
Rarer than radium,
Commoner than water, crueller than truth;
Dylan Thomas

To David Patrick Ingham, 15/3/1939 - 8/2/2001.

summary

In this thesis, I have undertaken an examination of six Latin texts, all of which contain a narrative of a religious conversion which is central to the plot.

The six texts cover a variety of genres. The Pseudo-Clementine Romance uses a hoax narrative to give an air of respectability to its heretical content; the respective *Lives* of the saints Pelagia, Thaïs, and Mary of Egypt each present a different narrative of how a prostitute becomes an ascetic saint; Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is a comic fiction which ends with the conversion of its protagonist, Lucius, to the worship of the goddess Isis; finally, Augustine's *Confessions* is a spiritual autobiography, addressed to God.

I have examined the extent to which the use of example informs and affects the text. All of these narratives use example in one way or another to get their point across, using the events represented in the text to convince the reader more forcefully than direct preaching could do, and yet each uses example in a different way, marrying it to a different narrative strategy and with a different effect each time. Because the six narratives admit a multiplicity of meaning, I have not confined myself to one analytical technique.

The discussion of the wide range of narrative techniques used in these six text, and the comparison of similarities and differences has led me to consider whether or not such a diverse range of texts can be considered to constitute a genre of religious conversion in their own right. I have argued in this thesis that the 'narrative of religious conversion' as a general type of writing is not a genre in its own right, but rather transcends genre, being representative of something more fundamental to human psychology.

DECLARATION :

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1:

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

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I hereby give my consent for this thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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preface and acknowledgements

It only remains to offer my thanks to those who have helped in various ways over the time it has taken to write this thesis.

I would like to thank those present and former members of the Classics department of the University of Wales Swansea who have offered their help in various ways and to various degrees, particularly Prof. Alan Lloyd, Prof. Stephen Mitchell (now at Exeter University), Dr. Joan Booth (now at Leiden), Fritz-Gregor Hermann (now at Edinburgh) and Dr. Daniel Ogden. Particular thanks must go to Dr. Ceri Davies, who served as my supervisor during Dr. Morgan's sabbatical, and most of all to Dr. John Morgan, my supervisor, for his support, constructive criticism, sarcasm, and his faith in me.

The chaplains of Swansea University, who collectively have operated as a counselling service, sounding board for my more abstruse theological ideas, and as a tea room over the years, also deserve a mention here, as do the staff of the University of Wales Swansea Egypt Centre and the congregation of Pantygwydr Baptist Church, Uplands Swansea all of whom have supported me over the last few years in many different ways.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Tracy, who has put up with me and supported me over the last few years through the various crises this dissertation's production has created.

This work is dedicated to Tracy, and to my father, David Patrick Ingham, whose pride in me was no less for never having seen me gain this degree.

strangely warmed: an introduction

> In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.
>
> I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, "This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?" Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them according to the counsels of His own will.
>
> After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations, but I cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He "sent me help from his holy place." And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror.[1]

Thus is written what is probably the best-known conversion narrative in Protestant Christianity, written by one of the most prolific hymn-writers and preachers of the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival, and one of the fathers of the Methodist Church. Wesley's body of work is of an intimidating size, but much of his preaching hinges on this one event: already a churchgoer, he experiences a conversion to a vibrant, life-changing faith hitherto outside his experience.

Wesley is clearly a shrewd editor. This event occurs three years into the journal narrative - but those three years are condensed into a single chapter, since Wesley is clearly only

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[1] Journal of John Wesley, entry dated 24th May, 1738 (Tyndale series, Chicago, 1951 edition).

including in his memoir the interesting and significant events - or, to be more exact, those events which are significant and interesting to him, which he would have be significant to the reader[2]. That the event of his conversion to what we would now call Evangelicalism was significant to him and instrumental to the Protestant denomination which yet preserves his heritage is undeniable. It certainly covers more space than several of the preceding months in his narrative do together.

Wesley takes pains to represent this event as significant, and uses it as a tool to presenting his faith and what it means to him, in order to communicate his essential truths to others.

It is interesting to note that he ends his account not with a simple explanation of the truths he has learnt but instead with an examination of what his new understanding of the way the universe works means to him. We are not to learn directly from Wesley, but from his *example*. What this essentially means is that the didactic force of the text is presented not in discourse but in the narrative: that the reader, rather than being convinced of the point with a blunt argument, is in effect *shown* the argument. Wesley's dialogue here is calculated to convince, and yet does not directly do so. Instead, the reader is given the evidence - that a conversion to Evangelical Christianity has altered Wesley's life both radically and for the better - and thus the opportunity to consider whether a similar conversion would do them as much good.

[2] Wesley's first chapter includes an account of, among other things, a sea voyage to the Americas and back, which would hardly be routine, even for a man of the early 18th century.

The first object of this study is to prove that this strategy is not only very old - indeed, ancient - but that it is, in some of the most ancient narratives of conversion, a constant, driving force that forms the basis of a conversion tale's narrative strategy, regardless of its complexity or lack thereof. There are many strategies used to represent religious conversion in narrative, and the second object of this study will be simply to explore these more complex strategies, and to examine both the interplay between these strategies and the standard use of example as a tool to convince.

This dissertation concentrates on six narratives of religious conversion, dating from the second to seventh centuries AD. Not all of them are Christian, not all of them are real, not all of them pretend to be real. All of them are in Latin, although some are translated or adapted from originals in Greek and/or Syriac. What they all have in common is that however they attempt to convince the reader or change the reader's perception of his world, all of them depend in some manner or another on example. If the evangelical narrative of religious conversion can be said to be a genre (and discussion of whether it constitutes a genre or not will inform this study and be settled in the conclusion), it seems that the use of example as a tool to convince is a genre-wide characteristic.

The first section of this study concentrates on four of these narratives; these are of varying complexity.

They include the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, of the early second century AD[3], and three stories from Book One of the Latin version of the *Vitae Patrum: The Life of Saint Thaïs the Prostitute, The Life of Saint Pelagia the Prostitute,* and *The Life of Saint Mary of Egypt the Prostitute*[4].

All four of these narratives were chosen simply because, while all of them exhibit to a certain degree the generic characteristics of their genre (namely that of "Acts" narrative for the *Recognitions,* and hagiography for the *Lives*), each story has its own unique characteristics. Each narrative is dependent upon the use of example, as we shall see, but each uses the strategy of example to bring the reader to different conclusions.

The second section of this study concentrates on what may be the two most famous narratives of conversion in the world of later antiquity: the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius and the *Confessions* of Augustine[5]. These two narratives are extremely complex and utterly different both to each other and to the other four narratives studied here. Nevertheless, both still use the strategy of example in their narrative in striking and original ways.

Obviously, before the study is to begin, a few words need to be said concerning terminology and methodology.

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[3] The text used is reproduced in Rehm (1965), with reference to the translation contained in Roberts and Donaldson (1886).

[4] Texts for all three of the hagiographies are in *PL73.*

[5] The text of the *Confessions* used is O'Donnell (1992), although reference has also been made to Clark (1995). For the *Metamorphoses*, I have used Arthur Hanson's Loeb edition (1995) and EJ Kenney's text of *Cupid and Psyche* (1990).

conversion, and the six narratives

In a discussion concerning the representation of religious conversion in literature, it of course becomes necessary to explain what we mean by the term "conversion".

Conversion can most simply be described as the process by which one decides to accept a religion or a philosophy. To be converted is to experience a realisation that things are not as you thought they were, and consequently to change your way of seeing yourself, other people and the world. A conversion is thus a radical change in the alignment of one's beliefs.

The twentieth century's definitive work on religious conversion in antiquity is A. D. Nock's study on the subject, simply called *Conversion*.

Nock, while giving a comprehensive study of conversion in later antiquity with special reference to the conversion of Augustine as represented in the *Confessions*, denied that there was, in the ancient world, any possibility of a genuine religious conversion outside of Judaism and Christianity[6]. He saw paganism as "emotionally sterile"[7], and considered the conversion of a pagan to another pagan religion as being somehow less radical than a conversion to Christianity or Judaism.

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[6] Nock (1933), p14.
[7] *ibid.* p 134-5.

> This speculation is drawn into the religious sphere and made dogma; but it means "This is the significance of your earlier faith, of all men's faith": it completes and systematises what was there, but does not substitute things new for things old. It is a theology of unity and mutual understanding, and not of conflict. Adhesion to a new cult was thus made easier: it need involve no more than the devotion of Catholics to the cultus of a new saint.[8]

Nock's analysis is consistent, but his definition of conversion is in my opinion somewhat idiosyncratic. He suggests that while conversion to Christianity involved a radical realignment of beliefs, the awakening of an already nominally pagan person to a deeper and life-changing religious commitment was simply a movement within one's religion. Nock compares this to Catholicism; but as any Catholic will tell you, the saints of the Universal Church do not have "cults" as such. Catholics do not technically pray *to* saints. Rather, they pray *through* saints; the saints and the Virgin are believed to intercede for the believer with God. Different saints are prayed through for different purposes on different occasions, but all are part of the same faith.

This cannot be compared with the anarchic not-quite-competitive/ not-quite-harmonious religious texture of the pagan Roman world. Ancient paganism was not a monolithic establishment - particularly in the later Roman Empire.

In most cases, the very word 'pagan' is used simply to refer to an adherent of any religion apart from Christianity or Judaism. By the time of the writer of the *Recognitions*, and certainly by the time of Apuleius, there were many other religions in the philosophical marketplace, many of which competed directly with Christianity - these 'mystery religions', which included the cults of Isis and Mithras, while coexisting with the other pagan religions,

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[8] *ibid.* p 137.

required a devotion above and beyond that normally expected in the pagan world[9]. Even outside the mystery cults, the cultural vortex that was the Roman Empire absorbed and naturalised the cults of so many nations that to say that there was a 'typical' pagan religion is nonsense.

John Wesley was already - like the vast majority of Englishmen in his day - already nominally Christian; and yet, he could still in later life describe his experience of the 24th May 1738 as being a watershed moment, and his conversion to the life-affirming brand of Christianity that would become the driving force of England's 18th century Evangelical Revival. His conversion is perhaps more comparable to the nominal pagan/committed pagan transformation described by Nock, and thus, in Nock's thesis, not really a conversion at all. So, was Wesley's strange warming an evangelical awakening or a true conversion? The difference is no more than the "to-MAH-to"/"to-MAY-to" dichotomy - no more than a difference of terminology.

Conversion, in Greek, is μετάνοια (*metánoia*), literally a 'change of mind' - and, in Greek, the word is used to refer to a change of mind in any context at all, whether religious, philosophical, political, or utterly mundane. The term is so wide as to cover absolutely any psychological change of direction at all. As such, it covers the change of mind (or change of heart) which would cause one to adopt a new way of thinking, to undergo a change of mind.

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[9] Burkert (1987)12-13, while asserting that mystery cults were not religions in their own right, does point out that they still received a higher level of personal devotion than other pagan practices.

For the purposes of this study, Conversion is defined as a transforming instant or process leading one to a committed and life-changing expression of a philosophy (and a religious faith is an expression of a philosophy), personally expressed and personally acted upon. A narrative of conversion is a narrative which contains a representation of this "change of mind".

All of the texts studied here are, needless to say, narratives of conversion, inasmuch as they contain a representation of this change of mind, and a realignment in a central character's religious thinking.

The four relatively simple conversion narratives examined in the first part of this study are easy enough to justify: the fictional Clement of the *Recognitions* converts from paganism to Christianity, while the three prostitutes give up lives of debauchery and become hermits through definitive, transforming instances of the grace or judgement of God, as demonstrated in two cases by the words of a male preacher, and in one case by the direct intervention of the Virgin.

The Lucius of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, although the protagonist of a sometimes bawdy, sometimes bizarre comic novel, still undergoes a conversion, from a paganism which is at the most nominal in its devotion into the kind of person who accosts people at street corners and tells them how wonderful his new religious faith is. And of course, the Augustine who is protagonist of the *Confessions*, although ultimately convinced of the truth

of the Christian faith by his discourses with Ambrose[10], is finally, decisively converted to what he considers to be a complete and worthwhile expression of the Christian faith in his narrative - if not in real life[11] - by an experience in a garden.

It is interesting to note that there is no chronological relation to complexity in these stories. While the *Recognitions*, by far the most simple of the texts, is the earliest, the next earliest, the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, is arguably the most complex narrative in my sample. Similarly, the various texts here came from different milieux and serve different purposes.

The *Recognitions*, as we shall see, dates most probably to the second century AD[12], and was the product of an heretical Christian group - thus, an underground movement within an underground movement. Translated into Latin - and probably expurgated[13] - the *Recognitions* justifies its heretical theology by purporting to be the memoir of a famous father of the church. Its intention - to propagate an Ebionite version of Christian doctrine[14] - is given extra credibility by its account of the conversion of Clement and his subsequent travels. Written for Christians, the *Recognitions* is intended as propaganda for a particular view of the Christian church - one which, in later centuries, was not to prevail.

The three stories of the 'prostitute saints' are more properly hagiographies which contain conversion narratives. These three stories increase over time in both length and

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[10] However, at least one commentator considers Augustine, like Wesley, to have been a Christian (of a sort) from a very early point. See, for example, Clark (1993, p 15).
[11] See Courcelle (1950), pp 188ff.
[12] See n. 4, p 22 below.
[13] See n. 6, p 23 below.

complexity (the only instance among the texts of this study where there is any chronological progression at all), and show how a very narrow theme - that of a prostitute turned miracle-working cenobite - can be handled in very different ways, for very different purposes. Unlike the Greek romances, to which hagiographies are often compared, the hagiographies, often copied - like the *Recognitions* -in the cheaper codex form would be read out to an illiterate Christian congregation.[15]

The earliest story, *The Life of Saint Thaïs the Prostitute*, written in the latter half of the fourth century[16] presents us with a brutal moral universe where a fallen woman can only be redeemed by her willingness to undergo an extreme punishment.

The Life of Saint Pelagia the Prostitute, a more ornate tale dating from a century later[17], while still about a prostitute who gives it all up to become a hermit, instead seems to argue that the way to heaven for the harlot is through becoming master of her own destiny; the only way that this can legitimately be achieved, the story tells us, is if the woman in question is to become a man.

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[14] See n. 5, p 22 below.
[15] In fact, in many Orthodox churches even today, hagiographies are read to the congregation on certain dates in the liturgical year. The Life of Mary of Egypt, for example, is read out in its entirety during the week before Easter.
[16] See n34, p 38 below.
[17] See n60, p 48 below.

The third story, *The Life of Saint Mary of Egypt, the Prostitute* is a very late example of the form, dating to the seventh century[18], and is far more complex. The reader sees the prostitute-turned-hermit's narrative through the eyes of Zosimas, a renowned Orthodox elder, and it is his example rather than the prostitute's that we are to follow, as Zosimas hears and witnesses the idealised, unbelievable everything-but-the-kitchen-sink narrative of Mary of Egypt, and is encouraged and enriched by it - the message of this life, therefore, is a message in how to react to hagiography.

It should be noted that the theological concerns and sexual politics of the three stories do not reflect the theology and gender identification of their respective epochs - in fact, views of women similar to those implicit in all three stories were represented in Christian writings long before all three stories were written, and continued to be expressed long afterwards. These things reflect nothing more than the opinions of their writers. They do reflect perhaps some development in the form of hagiography, from the bald, brutal simplicity of Thaïs' story, to the elegant, romantic retelling of the story of Pelagia, to the over-the top story of Mary of Egypt - indeed, the story of Mary of Egypt is almost cynical in its appropriation of the themes of a "good" hagiography, creating a kind of über-hagiography, an hagiography to end all hagiographies..

[18] See n94, p 66 below.

The *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, although of the same century as the *Recognitions*, is of a much greater complexity and comes from a completely different background. Apuleius, philosopher and orator, offers us a pagan picaresque adventure tinged with a Platonic view of religion. The work's readership and its exact date are a matter for debate[19]; suffice to say that Apuleius' public and the Pseudo-Clementine author's public, while quite possibly contemporary, were of a very different mould, Apuleius having written for an educated Roman public, rather than the persecuted members of a growing but illegal religious sect.

Augustine's *Confessions* is written for a different readership again. Richer and more complex than the hagiographies, and openly reflecting Augustine's own theological concerns, the *Confessions* serves not just as an autobiography, but as a justification of the validity of his faith, the efficacy of his conversion and the usefulness of his theology. The *Confessions* presuppose not only a Christian faith, but also a high level of intellectual achievement, and it is fair to assume that the *Confessions*, unlike the hagiographies, was written for Augustine's peers[20].

The six stories, therefore, come from different times and different milieux, and presuppose a different audience. While five of these stories are for Christians by Christians, each of these five stories - even the three thematically similar hagiographies - has with it a moral

[19] Dowden (1994) offers a fairly early date for the composition of the *Metamorphoses*, suggesting that it was written for his contemporaries during his time at Rome in the 150s AD. S. Harrison (2000), on the other hand, suggests an extremely late date for the *Metamorphoses*' composition, arguing that the religious sections of the *Metamorphoses* are a parody of Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales* (itself written between AD 171 and 176), and thus must date to a later time. This is certainly possible, but I find myself more convinced by Dowden's arguments, since his evidence for an early date comes from a wide variety of sources.
[20] Chadwick (1986), 66ff; Clark (1993), 39ff.

and theological background which is unique to it; all of these stories have a point, but in each case the point is different.

The type and level of education presupposed by the audience of the six narratives again is different, from the persecuted, underground Christian audience of the *Recognitions*, to the urbane, philosophically and rhetorically trained pagans of the Second Sophistic to whom the *Metamorphoses* is addressed; from the ordinary (and presumably not highly educated) congregation member listening to the reading of a hagiography to the ecclesiastical peers of Augustine.

It is interesting that not one of these stories is addressed to anyone outside the narrative's milieu. None of the narratives attempt to convert the reader from a different religion, in the way that a modern Evangelical testimony would. While to a modern reader Apuleius' work might arguably appear to attempt to convert a reader into the Isiac mysteries, we shall see that this solution is in fact problematic, and that the conversion Apuleius seeks to effect is more a conversion into textual and philosophical mysteries rather than into the specific mysteries of Isis[21]. Only Clement really converts to Christianity from *outside*; and yet, his narrative is still firmly intended for those *inside*.

This is not as strange as it might at first seem. Wesley's story, for example, is assumed to be directed at other Christians of a kind (it being almost unthinkable that a man of his age and country could be other than Protestant or Catholic). To give another roughly

contemporary example, John Newton, the one-time slave trader who would later write the well-known hymn *Amazing Grace*, although undeniably changed irrevocably by his conversion, still converted within a Christian milieu; like the prostitutes in the stories, Newton was well aware of basic Christian truths. It is only in the last century that Christians in the West have faced the problem of communicating their faith to those wholly outside a Christian milieu.

The conversions we see in these stories are all, at the very least *metánoiai* - changes of mind. Similarly, the changes they seek to induce in the reader are also changes of mind. It is not important from what a protagonist converted, or *to* what the protagonist has converted; but the quality and *effect* of the conversion is the important thing. If Augustine was already technically a Christian when his conversion experience occurred in that garden in Milan, what he converted to was an *understanding*, an emotional and personal commitment to Christianity he had not hitherto experienced. Similarly, when Wesley found himself "strangely warmed", he had simply experienced a *metánoia* in his attitude to his already Protestant Christianity. All these stories feature a life-defining change of religious philosophy. Whether or not they actually feature a change of religion is in some cases arguable, and in all cases beside the point.

As said before, this study seeks to examine narrative strategies present in narratives of religious conversion, and perhaps to give some clue as to how they use these strategies to affect the reader. In order to manage this best, many different approaches have been

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[21] See below, pp 117-131.

taken. In his own study of the *Metamorphoses*, J. J. Winkler summarises his methodology this way:

> My aim here has been to conduct the analysis at a level that will satisfy not only the smart general reader but also those knowledgeable in each discipline without confusing or alienating the rest. In practice this means that I try, wherever possible, to use narratological techniques for their implicit intelligibility and to avoid Members Only discussions of shop...[22]

This is perhaps something of a tall order, and perhaps it may be unnecessary to adhere strictly to this kind of practice in an MPhil dissertation submitted for a degree in Classics. However, Winkler's methodology is very useful to the critic, because it leaves open the widest number of strategies for interpretation. While having a working knowledge of the deconstructive strategies of, for example, Barthes - particularly his work on narrative codes[23] - has been of use, I have not felt a need to be constrained by a single critical methodology.

Texts which deal with religious conversion almost invariably have an agenda of some kind, and as such, are somewhat slippery to interpret, even in their simplest form. These texts are complex, polysemic and multivalent.

Each operates in a cultural context against which it must be read; however, these stories were also destined to be read and re-written in antiquity, within changing contexts. Their messages, consequently, were not static, even in the ancient world. Given this multiplicity of meaning, readers have to be aware of all the possibilities of reading these stories. In grappling with a number of these texts, I have found that repeated approaches to interpretation from a number of different angles have produced the most satisfying result.

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[22] Winkler (1985), ix.
[23] Barthes (1973, tr.1990), 18f.

It is vitally important not to oversimplify the six narratives of this study, or to read them in an exclusive, closed way. If this discussion is to be complete, it must recognise the complexity, polysemy and multivalence of these tales. If my arguments sometimes seem somewhat elliptical, it should be remembered that this reflects the elusive and evasive nature of a literature intended (as I hope to prove) to convince through indirect means.

part 1: clement and the prostitutes

i. unclean lips

i. 1. words from unclean lips: the *pseudoclementina*

> In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
> Above it stood the seraphims-. and each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
> And one cried unto another, and said, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.'
> And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.
> Then said I, 'Woe is me! For I am undone- because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips , for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'
> Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hands, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.
> And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, 'Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.'
> Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'
> Then said I, 'Here am I; send me.'
>
> Isaiah 6: 1-8 (KJV)

When Isaiah is called to be a prophet to the people of Judah (the Southern kingdom of Israel), he initially refuses. The grounds for his refusal are that he is a 'man of unclean lips', dwelling 'in the midst of a people of unclean lips'. What this means is unclear.

The most likely possibility is that Isaiah is aware of himself (or has an image of himself) as a hypocrite, a liar, and an idolater (since prayers to divinities in ancient times were almost invariably spoken[1], Isaiah, in offering praise to other gods beside the God of his people, would have defiled his mouth, thus becoming a 'man of unclean lips'). The seraph with the burning coal symbolically cancels out Isaiah's sin, cleansing Isaiah's mouth. Whether Isaiah's lips are clean' or 'unclean' is no longer an issue, since he is now commissioned and

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[1] For example, see Versnel, in *OCD*[3], 1243, Von Severus in *RAC* vol. 8 cols. 1156-1157, and *NPEA* vol. 3 cols. 828-34. Professor A. B. Lloyd affirms that this is the case in Egyptian prayers, such as prayers to Isis.

committed to speak the truth to his people, whether they want to hear it or not. And, in fact, Isaiah is warned in the subsequent verses of the same chapter that the children of Judah will ignore him anyway, whether or not he speaks the truth.

The matter of whether Isaiah's lips are 'clean' or not becomes a different one entirely if we take into account the very nature of *Isaiah* the document. *Isaiah* is a collection of different pieces in verse and prose, some narrative, some prophetic (i.e. part of the Biblical genre 'prophecy'), some satirical, purported to have been written in the later period of the dual monarchy of Israel over a period of more than fifty years. The book of *Isaiah* is regarded by many (although not all) critics as the result of an oral tradition, and the work of several authors, primarily the (controversial) 'Deutero-Isaiah', who is, if he actually existed as a separate entity, responsible for fifteen chapters of the book[2]. 'Deutero-Isaiah' may have composed his section of *Isaiah* up to three hundred years after the events related in his portion of the book, thus making the first-person narrative a lie. Of course, if there were several 'Isaiahs', then the first-person narrative as a whole becomes false. 'Isaiah' in the action of narration speaks to us through unclean lips, for he may not actually be Isaiah.

However, it matters little to us even if this is the case (although a conservative scholar would probably disagree). Isaiah's poetry is no less beautiful, his (/their) criticisms of his (/their) culture just as bitter, the prophecies of the coming of Messiah no less inspiring to the listener. Isaiah's lips, though unclean, are nonetheless touched with the coals of truth,

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[2] A survey of Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah can be found in Von Rad (1975), 147ff. and 238ff, while a brief survey of the various opinions concerning *Isaiah's* authorship can be found in Carroll Stuhlmeyer's article in *NJBC* 329-332.

and despite the apparent falsehood implicit in the text (if, in fact, such a falsehood exists), Isaiah's text is nevertheless of value, and, to its hearers, would have lost none of its impact, whether they were aware of its not having been composed by the actual Isaiah or not.

The point of all this is simple: value can still be derived from words spoken by unclean lips. A text, when written, legitimises itself, for it develops an existence of its own. *Isaiah,* although (possibly) written by many hands, is nonetheless a complete text with a specific theme, and has the right to be analysed as a composite, organic whole. A text written by a liar can still be honest about itself, and can still have much truth to tell us.

Which, via an admittedly circuitous route, brings us to the Pseudo-Clementine Romance.

The so-called Pseudo-Clementine Romance exists in two versions. The earlier is a Greek text known as the *Homilies,* which consists of twenty books, each claiming to be a sermon or dialogue of Peter the Apostle as related by his successor as Bishop of Rome, Clement. Some of the sermons are prefaced by a short narrative describing the circumstances under which Peter gave the sermon or joined in the dialogue.

The other text is possibly a later abridgement of the *Homilies,* although there is a case for both the *Recognitions and Homilies* being developed from an earlier work. Entitled the *Recognitions,* it consists of ten books, again mostly containing the words of the Apostle framed by a brief narrative. This exists in full in a Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia, Jerome's sometime friend and enemy, accompanied by a preface, again by Rufinus. There also exists an incomplete version in Syriac.

The narrative of the romance remains about the same as it is in its longer parent (although slightly more detailed), while the encapsulated theological discourse is significantly shorter. The romance is still composed of approximately eighty-six percent discourse and fourteen percent narrative, most of which is concentrated in the last four books of the work. The narrative is structurally very simple, and parts seem to have been adapted from the plot of an earlier pagan romance[3]. The plot of the *Recognitions* can be broken down into seven main sections, as follows:

1. Clement (the first-person narrator) converted to Christianity (I. 1-12).
2. Clement introduced to Peter the apostle; Clement's discourse with Peter (I.13-74).
3. The three-day dispute /preaching contest with Simon Magus (II. 1-III. 62).
4. Simon's flight and evil plan to discredit Peter and Peter's pursuit of him; Peter's preaching (III.63-VI. 15).
5. Clement relates his tragic family history and is almost immediately reunited with his mother and brothers (VII. 1-38).
6. Peter preaches to/discourses with an old man who turns out to be Clement's father (VIII. 1-X. 51).
7. Simon Magus attempts to use magic against Peter and his companions, who foil him by turning his spell against him. All ends happily (X. 52-72).

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[3] See Perry (1967), 285-293, and Pervo (1994), 250-25. Also Hägg (1983), 162-3.

Since the narrative substance of the romance itself is the same in the two works (although perhaps better served by the *Recognitions*), I shall concentrate on the *Recognitions*.

The writer of the *Recognitions* identifies himself as Clement of Rome, and the action of the narrative concerns Clement's travels with Peter, his involvement in Peter's adventures, and the circumstances leading up to his being reunited with his long-lost mother, brothers, and father. The text is addressed to the Apostle James. However, it is widely agreed that the real Clement did not write the romance; indeed, Clement himself could not have written it. It is unknown exactly when the *Homilies* or the *Recognitions* were written; arguments have been made for the second, third, or fourth centuries[4]. Further, the writer is generally regarded as having been an Ebionite, part of a Judaist sect - later declared heretical - within the Christian church[5]. In the *Recognitions,* it appears that the Pseudo-Clementine author's

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[4] The *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the Pseudo-Clementine Romance is 231, the date of composition of Origen's, *Philocalia* which quotes from the *Recognitions* (22).

[5] Judaist Christians believed that Christianity should retain its Jewish roots, thus practising circumcision (the root of a very early schism within the Church, as shown in *Galatians* 5: 2-12 and *Acts* 15: 1-35). This was certainly true of the Ebionites, hence Irenaeus writing: 'As to the prophetical writings, they endeavour to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practise circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the [Old Testament] law, and in their Judaic style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God' (Irenaeus 1. 20, cited Stevenson [1987], 99). The Ebionites also denied the divinity of Christ, hence: 'the heresy of Arius is that of Ebion and Artemas' (Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1. 4, cited Stevenson [1987], 329). In fact, it appears that while some Ebionites denied the divinity of Christ and yet still accepted his essential superiority, his miracles, and his birth of a virgin, many of the Ebionites went so far as to claim that Jesus was no more than an especially gifted and normally-begotten human being, going further than even the Arians. Both groups of Ebionites are mentioned by Eusebius (*HE,* III. 27), who also explains the origin of the name 'Ebionites' as referring not to a person called Ebion; rather he claims it is 'the name by which a poor man is called by the Hebrews" (*HE,* III. 27. 6), signifying the "poverty of their understanding" (*op. cit.*). The writer of the Pseudo-Clementine Romance clearly belongs to the lesser category of Ebionites, hence his assertion of the Virgin Birth etc. (for example, on the superiority of Christ, see *Recognitions* I. 45ff). Irenaeus and Theodoret both also claim that the Ebionite take on the canon of scripture ignored the Pauline epistles. This is significant because the Pauline corpus is the most significant and influential body of early Christian doctrinal writing, and the primary source of the doctrine of Christianity as an entirely new religion, rather than a sect within Judaism (as seen in *Romans* 2:17-4-25). A brief discussion of Ebionitism can be found in Pelikan (1971), 24.

theological teaching may have been edited or censored by Rufinus himself[6].

The Recognitions stand in the rather strange position of an autobiography purportedly written by and addressed to men who are already dead, all the while still claiming to be true. Further, the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies* attempt to legitimise the (heretical) teachings of the Ebionite sect by passing them off as the actual sayings of Peter the apostle. The Pseudo-Clementine Romance, therefore, can, like a few other texts (the *Augustan History,* for example), be definitively categorised as a hoax, a narrative lie. However, despite these difficulties, the *Recognitions* as a text is eminently suitable for our purposes, since it is a wholly typical narrative of religious conversion. Useful words are here again spoken from less than pure lips.

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[6] Rufinus, prefacing his translation of the *Recognitions*, writes: *sunt autem et quaedam in utroque corpore de ingenito deo genitoque disserta et de aliis nonnullis quae ut nihil amplius dicam excesserunt intelligentiam nostram. haec ergo ego tamquam quae supra uires meas essent aliis reseruare malui quam minus plena proferre* ("There are also, in both texts [i.e. the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*], writings concerning the unbegotten God and the begotten, as well as several other subjects. To cut a long story short, they are beyond my powers of understanding. Therefore, since they are beyond my own powers, I prefer to leave these passages for others to translate, rather than to offer them to you incomplete."). Since the Ebionite sect's teachings were of course heretical to Rufinus, this may have been what he was talking about here, quite possibly finding that (since he clearly believed that the real Clement of Rome wrote this) the teachings contained in the *Recognitions* differed a great deal from what he knew of the writings of the real Clement. Unable to reconcile the two bodies of work, he may have simply left out the offending passages, rather modestly ascribing his inability to translate to his own lack of understanding rather than any heresy on the part of the *Recognitions*' author. Although we will never know how much of the text Rufinus actually omitted from his translation, the theological content of the *Homilies* can, of course, give us some clue. For example, the Christology of *Recognitions* I. 45-52, although expurgated, shows Ebionitic influence; compare, for example, *Homily* XVI. 15, where, in refutation of Simon Magus' assertion that Christ must be God, Peter replies, 'Tell us how this is possible; for we cannot affirm this, because we did not hear this from Him,' although he then goes on to affirm the begotten nature of Christ and the virgin birth in the following chapter. More evidence can be found in *Recognitions* I. 75-6, where Paul, although not represented by name, is presented as a vicious caricature. See also Roberts and Donaldson (1886), 69ff.

Nancy Shumate, in her book *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius'* Metamorphoses[7], seeks to define the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius as conforming to the model of a conversion narrative. In so doing, she develops a very useful working definition of the narrative of conversion itself.

Drawing from sociological studies of religious conversion, Shumate identifies four stages into which a religious conversion (and interestingly, a general internal paradigm shift such as prefaces a scientific discovery) falls. The first of these is a period of existential crisis, a baffled struggle against a situation or state which the subject is unable to deal with given his/her current world view. The second stage, which Shumate terms the 'incubation period', is where the potential convert feels that he/she is no longer able to deal with the situation (whatever it may be) and gives up trying to reach a solution, falling into a state often characterised by despair. The third stage is no more than the insight, the 'flash of inspiration', the vision of God, the hearing of a new philosophical approach to life just at the right moment.

After the point of insight comes a period of verification. Here the convert constructs his or her revelation in the light of his/her own knowledge (for example: someone converted to Christianity through the Church of England would, in this scheme, necessarily practice his/her faith through the medium of Anglicanism; on the other hand, someone who, say, encounters and embraces Christianity in a Pentecostal meeting would similarly express his/her Christianity in a Pentecostal setting). This fourth stage is often accompanied by a

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[7] Shumate (1996), *passim*.

zeal for knowledge, a wish to absorb as much of the teachings of the faith in which the convert finds him/herself as possible[8].

Shumate then draws from this psychological model and applies it to the psychology of narrated (and narrating) characters: namely, Apuleius' Lucius, Augustine, and Tolstoy. Not all narratives of conversion in late Antiquity follow Shumate's adopted model; most tend to be simpler affairs. Often, the conversion of the protagonist is swiftly related as a necessary part of the story prefacing the biography to follow. Some narratives that contain religious conversions do seem to have their protagonist experience the four-stage pattern of conversion, but often contain variations[9].

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[8] For a more complete discussion of this model of conversion and a review of the psychological studies that produced it, see Shumate (1996), pp 175ff. This view of conversion is, interestingly, paralleled by some of the very groups it critiques. For example, Dr. Peter Masters, minister of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, an historical Fundamentalist church based in London, writes in the journal *Sword and Trowel* (60, no. 2 1996, pp 14ff.) that conversion is a process, divided into five stages: *Conception (or Initial Regeneration)* where the potential believer becomes "*awakened* to our need and *convicted* of our sin" (italics Masters' own; id. p20); *Awakened and Convicted (sic)*, of which Masters writes, "We hang our heads... we know our case is hopeless unless God freely pardons us, and washes and renews us"; *Repentance and Faith* (the moment of conversion); *Justification and New Birth;* and finally, *Sealed and Assured.* While Masters, as a Calvinist, has of course very different interpretations of *why* a potential convert would go through these stages, the parallels are obvious. Masters' first stage parallels Shumate's in its recognition that a personal crisis initiates the conversion process, although of course, Masters imputes the beginning of this crisis to an act of God; the second stage is clearly analogous to Shumate's "Incubation" stage; the third is, of course, the moment of conversion, while the fourth and fifth stages, virtually indistinguishable to anyone without a grasp of Calvinist theology, clearly echo the Shumate's stage of verification and consolidation. Masters' view of conversion predates the publication of Shumate's by a few months, and it is unlikely that Masters, who espouses a traditional Fundamentalist distrust of secular psychology (as evinced, for example, in Almy, G, "How one man stifled Psychoheresy for 1400 years", *Sword and Trowel* 78, no. 4 2000, and Bobgan, Martin & Deidre, "Hypnosis: Medical, Scientific or Occultic?", *Sword and Trowel* 80, No. 2 2001) is aware of the sociological studies which inform Shumate, and indeed, cites only his own experience and his somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of Scripture as evidence.

[9] For example, in the life *of Saint Pelagia the Prostitute (Vitae Patrum* I), it appears that the first two stages of the conversion sequence are actually undergone by the Bishop Nonnus who intercedes for the eponymous heroine and prays for her conversion (see p 54 below).

However, the psychology of Clement the narrator's conversion does, in fact, conform to this pattern, however swift its narration (the entire story of Clement's conversion can be considered as occurring in *Recognitions*. I. 1- 14).

Clement (as narrator) tells us how he spent a great deal of time agonising about what was going to happen to him when he died, and sought out various philosophical schools to see if they could solve his problem[10] (stage 1: crisis).

> ego Clemens in urbe Roma natus, ex prima aetate pudicitiae studium gessi dum me animi intentio uelut uinculis quibusdam sollicitudinis et maeroris a puero innexum teneret. inerat enim mihi cogitatio incertum sane unde initium sumpserit crebro ad memoriam meam conditionem mortalem adducens simulque discutiens utrumne sit mihi aliqua uita post mortem an nihil omnino postea sim futurus sicut non fuerim antequam nascerer uel si nulla prorsus uitae huius erit post obitum recordatio et ita immensitas temporis cuncta obliuioni ac silentio dabit ut non solum non simus sed neque quod fuerimus habeatur in memoria.
>
> I, Clement, was born in Rome, and from the very earliest age I was a lover of chastity, while the natural direction of my thoughts held me, as if with chains of worry and sorrow. There was a thought in me - I'm not entirely sure where it came from - which constantly led me to think about my mortal state, bringing me to discuss whether or not there would be a life after death for me, or whether I would be nothing at all after death, just as I had been nothing before I was born, and whether there will be no memory of this life after death, so that time eternal shall render all things forgotten and unspoken, so that we shall not only cease to be but that there shall be no record of our ever having been.[11]

It should be noted that there is no specific point where Clement's crisis is said to have begun; Clement the narrator describes himself as having been in crisis "from the earliest age". Clement finds no solutions in his investigations and reaches a state of desperation (stage 2: incubation/despair).

> coangustatus igitur inuentione rerum aiebam apud memetipsum quid inaniter laboramus cum manifestus sit terminus rerum?

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[10] *Recognitions* I. 3.
[11] *Recognitions* I. 1. 1-3.

> And so, crushed by the things I had found, I cried to myself, "why do we pointlessly labour, since the end of things is clear?"[12]

Clement finally decides to bribe a magician into conjuring up a ghost[13], who then might be able to tell him the afterlife is like. Talked out of this by a philosopher of his acquaintance[14], Clement finally comes across the evangelist Barnabas. Clement is persuaded by Barnabas' teaching and all his questions are put to rest (stage 3: paradigm shift).

> quibus ego auditis, cum reliqua multitudine sequi eum coepi et audire quae diceret. intellegebam sane quod nihil dialecticae artis esset in homine sed simpliciter et absque ullo dicendi fuco quae audisset a filio dei uel uidisset exponeret. adsertiones enim suas non argumentorum uirtute muniebat sed uerborum et mirabilium quae adnuntiabat testes multos ex ipso etiam circumstante populo producebat.
>
> When I had heard these things, I began to follow him, along with the rest of the crowd, and to listen to what he had to say. I plainly understood that the man had no rhetorical tricks, but rather that he preached simply and without any fancy talk things which he had heard or seen from the Son of God. He did not use clever arguments to back up his points, but produced from the people standing around him many witnesses of the words and miracles of which he told us.[15]

After defending Barnabas from an angry mob[16], Clement decides to join Barnabas as a missionary.

> denique cum ego dicerem tu mihi tantum eius uiri quem apparuisse dicis expone doctrinam et ego meis sermonibus tua dicta conponens omnipotentis dei regnum iustitiamque praedicabo et post haec si uolueris etiam nauigabo tecum ualde enim cupio uidere ludeam uobiscum fortassis perpetuo permansurus.
>
> Eventually, I said to him, "Only tell me the teachings of that man who you say has appeared and I will translate the things you have said into my own language, and I will preach the kingdom and righteousness of God Almighty; and after that, if you so wish, I'll even sail with you, for I want very much to see Judea. Perhaps I will stay with you always.[17]

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[12] *Recognitions* I. 4. 1.
[13] *Recognitions* I. 5. 1-4.
[14] *Recognitions* I. 5. 5-8.
[15] *Recognitions* I. 7. 14-15.
[16] *Recognitions* I. 9-10.
[17] *Recognitions* I. 11. 1-2.

Clement is brought eventually to Peter, with whom he decides to stay, and learn all he can[18] (stage 4: verification).

Another way in which the *Recognitions* is wholly typical of ancient narratives containing religious conversions is the position of Clement's conversion in the narrative. In most ancient texts that contain a conversion to Christianity, the actual event of conversion happens at the beginning of the narrative, and is by no means a climactic event in terms of the story. It has been suggested that the separation of Clement's family parallels the separation of lovers in the archetypal Greek romance. By extension, Clement's conversion parallels the beginning of the formulaic Greek romance (for example, the romances of Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus), where a hero and heroine fall in love; this love is the central theme and motivation of everything that happens in the romance[19].

The conversion of Clement in the *Recognitions* serves to 'set up' the plot of the romance; it serves as a preface, and, like the 'love at first sight' premise of the pagan romance, acts as the context in which the rest of the plot unfolds. The events that surround the conversion of Clement (i.e. his worries about the afterlife, his despair, his philosophical investigations, his abortive attempts to contact the dead) are not referred to in any meaningful fashion in the rest of the text. The conversion of Clement is prefatory to the plot, presented in order to begin the sequence of events in the story by motivating Clement to travel with an

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[18] *Recognitions* I. 14. 4.

[19] On the milieu of the Greek novel, see Holzberg (1995) 9-11, Perkins (1995) 202ff and Bowie (1994). On the correspondence of Clement's separated family to the separated lovers common to Greek romance, see Holzberg (1995) 24.

apostle, and firmly identifying Clement as - since he is associated with the apostle - being on the side of Right.

Little is made of the emotional or spiritual impact of this change on Clement; his conversion is simply expressed as an answer to Clement's questions and placed to one side. Any evangelistic force the conversion may have is implicit within subsequent events. In this narrative, the deeds of the convert - or rather the deeds of the convert and his companions - are the commendation for Christianity, rather than the state of the convert's soul, and, as such, the narrative does not emphasise the psychological aspects of the conversion. There are very few mysteries in the text to be solved. If any kind of 'hermeneutic code'[20] is introduced in the text, its solution is soon revealed to us. No sooner has Clement explained about the loss of his mother and his brothers than they are reintroduced to Clement[21].

Only Clement's father Faustinianus is given slightly more in the way of an introduction. He first appears in *Recognitions* VIII. 1. 2, where he begins to dispute with Peter on matters theological.

> cum haec senex dixisset ego Clemens aio ad eum: audi pater si te frater meus Niceta obtinuerit quia non sine dei prouidentia mundus agitur in ista parte quae superest de genesi ego tibi potero respondere; est enim mihi notitia huius scientiae. et cum haec

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[20]Hermeneutic codes: see Barthes (1973) 18, 84ff and *passim*.

[21]Clement's account of his family's split: *Recognitions* VII. 8-11; Clement reunited with his mother and brothers: *Recognitions* VII. 12-23; Clement reunited with his father, *Recognitions* IX. 35. Clement's father is actually introduced in VIII. 2, but since the vast majority of the text between his introduction and identifications as Clement's father is taken up with theological dialogue between the old man and Peter; the mystery of the old man's identity is ignored in favour of the dialogue with Peter.

dixissem frater meus Aquila quid necesse est inquit ut eum patrem uocamus cum in mandatis habeamus neminem super terram patrem uocare? et post haec respiciens ad senem: non iniuriose inquit accipias pater quod fratrem meum culpaui quia te patrem uocaret habemus enim tale mandatum ne aliquem nomine isto uocitemus. cumque haec dixisset Aquila risit omnium adstantium coetus una cum sene et Petro. Aquila autem requirente causam cur omnes riserint aio ad eum quod tu in quo alios culpas id se facis qui senem appellaueris patrem. at ille negabat dicens uere nescio si eum patrem uocaui. interea Petrus mouebatur suspicionibus quibusdam sicut ipse nobis enarrauit postmodum et respiciens ad Nicetam expedi inquit quod proposuisti.

When the old man had said this, I, Clement, say to him, "listen, Father; if my brother Niceta brings you to agree that the world is not governed without the providence of God, I will be able to reply to you on the remaining matter of the world's beginning, for I am well acquainted with this teaching. And when I had said this, Aquila said, "What is the point of our calling him 'Father', when we are commanded to call no man father on this earth?" Then he turned to the old man and said, "Please don't take it as an insult, Father, that I have found fault with my brother for calling you 'father', for we have a rule that we call no one by that name." When Aquila had said this, everyone standing around laughed, including Peter and the old man. And when Aquila asked why they were all laughing, I said to him, "It's because you yourself do the very thing you told me off for - you called the old man 'father'" But he denied that he had done so, saying "I'm not aware that I called him 'father'." Meanwhile, Peter - as he was to tell us afterwards - was moved with certain suspicions, and, looking to Niceta, said, "Continue with your proposition."[22]

Clumsily interjected into the dispute between Peter and the old man is the brief scene reproduced above, where calling the old man 'father' seems to come so naturally to Clement and his brothers that Aquila does so without thinking. Peter begins to suspect the man's identity. Peter, again, twigs before Clement - it is Peter who also realises the identity of Clement's mother in VII. 19. 1 - and it is Peter who reveals all in IX. 35.

This rather clumsy incident is the nearest the text comes at any point to a statement of hermeneutic intent. It is not referred to at any later point in the text, and seems there purely to offer the reader a blatant clue to Faustinianus' identity, thus actually both creating (there has hitherto been no reason to suggest that this old man is in any way special, apart

from his dispute with Peter) and at once destroying (this man's special status is implicit in the brothers' ease in calling him 'father'; but the reason why is hinted at immediately) any dramatic tension in the space of a single paragraph.

The entire narrative seems to have as an implicit theme a sense of a mystery laid bare; the text holds no secrets. This feeling of 'a mystery solved' is perhaps best served by the considerable body of teaching encapsulated within the story, or rather framed by the story, for preaching and discourse is the work's primary *raison d'être* and comprises the greater portion of the text. Peter's teachings are presented as (correct) solutions to pressing problems: history, creation, existence; the intellectual threats of pagan religion and philosophy; problems of Christian morality. When Peter's teachings take the form of a dialogue (there are two: with Simon Magus and with Faustinianus), Peter is invariably seen as right, and always has the last word[23]. All of Peter's teachings are expressed in direct speech within Clement's simple first-person narrative. Clement's narratee can be considered to be a 'zero-degree' narratee, with no personality, no expectations and no opinions. The fact that the book is addressed to James the Apostle is not made apparent until the very end of book 3[24], and makes no essential difference to the narration of the story: the actual *récit* would be no different if a proposed narratee was not mentioned at all.

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[22] *Recognitions* VIII. 8. 1-5.
[23] Simon's retreat: *Recognitions* III. 49;
[24] *Recognitions* III. 74. 4.

Clement's conversion serves as a set-up to the debates which are the substance of the novel - but it is an essential set-up. Because Clement is presupposed to be one of the (for want of a better term) "Good Guys", his experiences, and his interpretation of his experiences, carry extra weight. *If you read this* (the book says) *and are convinced, you will find a solution to your problems, in the way that I, Clement, have done so.*

The author (whoever he may be) legitimises his teachings with a simple pretence: he poses as an earlier (and respected) theologian reporting the words of an apostle. In so doing, he gives his own ideas an otherwise impossible veneer of respectability. This, however, is the only trick that the author plays on us. The narrative is straightforward and linear. With the exception of the incident concerning Clement's father mentioned above, information revealed to us is almost invariably apropos of nothing[25]; there is no foreshadowing, no attempt to create dramatic tension. Clement's is a simple work, and although a lie, it nonetheless conforms to the typical patterns of a narrative containing a religious conversion in antiquity. Clement's fiction narrates an event of religious conversion at the start of the work. This is, as said above, normal for Christian narratives in Pre-Christian antiquity[26]. On the other hand, the two works upon which the second part of this study will concentrate approach conversion in very different ways.

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[25] For example, the dedication of the work to James (III. 74.4ff) or the unfolding of Clement's family history (VII. 8-11). There is certainly no indication of any kind that Clement and Peter's travelling companions, Niceta and Aquila, might actually turn out to be Clement's long-lost brothers.

[26] This is mainly true for narratives concerning acts of martyrs (as opposed to the apocryphal Acts narratives of the Apostles and the later hagiographies of the Desert Fathers).

i. 2. pleasure/purity/pain: prostitutes in hagiography

The lives of the martyrs and the saints, of all the popular narratives of the ancient world, are among the most disturbing and graphic in their representation of cruelty and suffering. Although the Greek novels contain many representations of startling cruelty, few of them contain quite the force and detail of the atrocities related in the pages of the hagiographies. The representation of pain in the Greek novels tends to be for the purpose of advancing the plot, or of creating pathos or tension, in order that the hero and heroine might ultimately overcome and live happily ever after. On the other hand, in the lives of the saints, pain is often self-inflicted, and is a desirable thing, a means for the martyr or eremite to ascend to a higher spiritual level[27]. The happy ending is the death and assumed rise to blessed status in heaven of the saint.

The classic hagiographic structure tends to contain the following elements in some order or another:

1. Account either of the saint's conversion to Christianity or of his/her upbringing in the church, normally quite brief.
2. Account of works performed by the saint, tending to fall into two categories: the instructive/allegorical and the miraculous; this is normally joined with an account of the saint's sufferings, inflicted either by the authorities (in the story of a martyr) or by the saint him/herself.

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[27] See Perkins (1994) and Perkins (1995), *passim*.

3. Account of the saint's death.[28]

Hagiographies are often simply told; as such, they can be good examples of a conversion narrative more advanced than that of the Pseudo-Clementine author, but considerably less developed and complex than that of the two main subjects of this study.

My sample consists of three lives from the Latin *Vitae Patrum*, book I: *The Life of Saint Pelagia the Prostitute, The Life of Saint Thaïs the Prostitute, and The Life of Saint Mary of Egypt, the Prostitute*[29]. The obvious thing that these three narratives have in common is, of course, that they are all about women who begin as prostitutes and end up as ascetic (or eremitic) saints. The three narratives have very different approaches to similar subjects; and most importantly, because of the nature of their protagonists, all contain prominent narratives of conversion; obviously, each prostitute has to become a miracle-working saint somehow. The three stories have other superficial similarities: in all three, a young woman of dubious morality suddenly, miraculously repents her lifestyle, and adopts a life of solitude and penitential suffering. In all three, the heroine dies at the end, wasted and devoured by the hardships of the ascetic life.

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[28] See, for example, the lives of Febronia (Brock and Harvey 1987, 41ff), Mary the Harlot (*ibid.* 36, and Waddell [1998], 208), Mary and Euphemia (John of Ephesus, *Lives* 12, in Brock and Harvey 133); the *Vita Antonii* (*PL*73 cols. 127-170 and Meyer [1950], 93ff); the *Vita Pauli* (Waddell 1998, 34-43); Onuphrius (*PL*73 cols. 211-220); Pachomius (*ibid.* cols. 227-272).

[29] Placed consecutively in *PL* 73. *Vita Sanctae Thaïsis Meretricis* can be found at cols. 661-4 cap. 374-5, *Vita Sanctae Pelagiae Meretricis* at cols. 663-672 cap. 376-380, and *Vita Sanctae Mariae Aegyptiacae Meretricis* at cols. 671-690 cap. 380-392.

The conversion story, in each of these three stories, is much more central to the action of the plot than it is in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance. As noted in part 1, the conversion of Clement, while vital to the plot of the *Recognitions* as the basic *milieu* for Clement and Peter's adventures, is the first thing narrated, and does not serve any other purpose in the plot other than as a basic assumption upon which the teachings of Peter and the adventures of Clement are based. In Clement's story, conversion is no more than the prologue.

On the other hand, the three chosen tales have as their *main subject* the miraculous transformation of a sinful woman into a chaste and dedicated ascetic; that is, the conversion is the primary defining event of the story.

i. 2. 1. thaïs - the deletion of the individual

Of the three stories I have chosen, Thaïs' is the shortest, amounting to no more than three fairly brief chapters. It is also the most difficult of the three for a modern audience to stomach, for reasons which will become apparent.

In the story, an abbot named Paphnutius hears about Thaïs, a prostitute who is so beautiful that men willingly sell all they have to buy her favours, sue each other in courts of law and even resort to murder, all for her sake.

Paphnutius travels to Alexandria and solicits her with the only coin he owns. In her quarters, he informs her that she damns herself with her actions; she falls to her knees and repents. After making her burn all of her possessions in public, Paphnutius takes Thaïs to a convent. He seals her in a small room with only a small opening for food and leaves her there for three years. When Paphnutius lets her out, she dies.

The modern reader is struck, first and foremost, by the astounding cruelty of this story. Thaïs practically begs to be punished[30], and spends three years in the dark, endlessly repeating the same phrase. One can't help imagining Thaïs at the end of this period, skeletal and stinking, hair matted, eyes dull, no longer capable of functioning in any other world than a tiny cell sealed with lead. There seems to be no moral judgement of

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[30] *Poenitentiam iniunge pater confido enim remissionem te orante sortiri, horarum tantum trium inducias peto et post hoc quocunque iusseris ueniam et quodcunque praeceperis faciam.* ("Decree penance for me, Father, for I

Paphnutius' actions, simply a bald retelling of events, with no real dwelling on details apart from a brief hyperbole concerning Thaïs' beauty at the start of the first chapter, and a brief aside about some burnt books[31].

The text is simply an account of the events; the author is not only unknown to us, but completely invisible, there being no comment from him at all. In reading this story, however, we should remember that there is a much greater difference between our own attitudes and the attitudes of a late Roman audience than we sometimes think. In a world where life had never been so cheap, suffering and death become important cultural signifiers[32].

An ancient reader would have brought certain presuppositions to this text as well. While we can in no way know everything that would have gone through a late Roman reader's head as he read something like *Thaïs,* we can make some reasonable guesses. First and foremost is the generic rule that *the monk is always right*[33] (TMIAR), which represents the editorial morality of the text. In a story with such flesh-creeping undertones as that of

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am sure that forgiveness will be gained by your intercession! I beg you, lead me for only three hours' delay, and after that, I will go wherever you order me to and do whatever you decree") *VSTM* 1, col. 661B.

[31] The one editorial comment in the entire text concerns the burning of Thaïs' possessions at the close of *VSTM* 1; the destroyed goods are worth "forty pounds of gold" (*erat autem pretium librarum quadraginta*). This is not so much a judgement on Thaïs' destruction of valuable goods, but, conversely a statement as to the seriousness and grave nature of Thaïs' commitment.

[32] Again, see Perkins (1995), *passim*, particularly 15ff.

[33] Except, of course, in a story where there is a monk specifically stated to have gone bad, although such stories are rare; and it should be noted that in such stories, it is normally a monk of a better sort who puts such a malefactor right. For example, a brief but typical story of this kind can be found in *Verba Seniorum* V. 4, *Vitae Patrum* V (*PL* 73. col. 874-5, para. 573-4). The reader will, however, notice that the worst the two monks in the story do wrong is the one thinking lustful thoughts, the other having no compassion on the first. Abbot Apollo is the hero of this particular tale, and soon deals with the problem.

Thaïs, this is an important fact to hold in mind. Paphnutius is as much the hero of the story as Thaïs is the heroine. To a fourth- or fifth-century reader[34], Paphnutius' treatment of Thaïs was nothing less than admirable[35].

In the mind of an early Christian, life was cheap. The Christian hero of the hagiography worked towards and actively encouraged a fate unknown to a pagan literary hero: suffering and death. The worst a traditional pagan hero could suffer would be a swift death in battle (with perhaps some abuse of the body after the hero had died); while on the other hand, in the romances, the nearest literary relatives of the hagiographies and apocryphal acts narratives[36], suffering and death are but things to be overcome or avoided just in the nick of time; the traditional Greek romance invariably has a happy ending.

The earlier hagiographies tended to be stories of martyrdom[37]. It was normal in the early church to consider martyrdom something to be looked for, the martyr imitating Christ in suffering and painful death[38], the happy ending of the hagiography tending to constitute the hero or heroine tortured to death while proclaiming Christ to the very end[39]. With

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[34] Thaïs, according to the Roman Catholic canon, is traditionally held to have died in AD 344. Her feast day was August 8th.

[35] Cloke (1995), 198-9.

[36] MacAlister (1987) briefly discusses some of the tropes of and forms of suffering in hagiographical narrative (98-9); see also Holzberg (1995) 23ff, Reardon (1991) 167-8 and Hägg (1983) 164-5.

[37] See, for example, the martyrdom of Polycarp (quoted Stevenson [1987] item 20, 23ff); and the martyrdoms of Martha (Brock and Harvey [1987] 67ff), Tarbo (*ibid.* 73ff), Thekla (*ibid.* 78ff), Anahid (*ibid.* 82ff) and the female Martyrs of Najram (*ibid.* 105ff). See also Perkins (1995) 122ff. Perkins argues that it was almost exclusively the case that Christian narratives presented the message "that to be a Christian was to suffer and die" (*ibid.* 24).

[38] A good example of this attitude is expressed in the letter of the confessors of Lyons, particularly in that part found in *HE* V. 2. 2-4 (quoted Stevenson [1987] item 25, p 46).

[39] For example, St. Lawrence of Rome, in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* II.

Christianity first legalised and finally made state religion in the fourth century[40], there were to be no new tales of Catholic martyrs; hence, a new kind of Christian hero was needed. The monk or hermit, whose utter dedication to his faith led to a self-inflicted mortification of the flesh which was often equal in terms of cruelty to anything a persecuting authority could have done, proved to be the ideal - and popular - substitute.

The first known story of an ascetic saint was Athanasius' *Life of Antony*[41] written in 357-8. By the end of the century, whole cenobitic communities had sprouted all over the southern Mediterranean, and the industry in hagiography once again did a booming business.

It is often difficult to imagine a non-Christian reader reading one of these stories and enjoying it. Evidence suggests that such a narrative was written by Christians, for

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[40] Galerius' Edict of Toleration was passed on 30th April 311, effectively ending the Great Persecution begun by Diocletian and allowing Christians free worship, although Galerius' counterpart Maximin Daia generally ignored the edict and continued to persecute Christians well into 312 (see *HE* 9. 4. 1 and Stevenson [1987] items 246-7, 280-1). In 313, Constantine's Edict of Milan not only gave full religious freedom to Christians but also made provision for the restoration of property seized during the Great Persecution (as per Lactantius, *On The Deaths of the Persecutors* 48. 2-12 and *HE* 10. 5. 2-14. See also Stevenson [1987] item 250, 284 ff). Persecution continued sporadically, however, for several years. In 319, Constantine's Eastern colleague, Licinius, staged a small persecution (*HE* 10. 8. 10-18, quoted Stevenson [1987] item 273, 215f). Toleration of Christian and Pagan worship alike was reaffirmed by Constantine in 324 (Eusebius *VC* 11. 56, quoted *ibid.* item 275, 318). By 336 at the latest, Constantine's Empire was officially Christian (*ibid.* items 304-7, 366ff). Heretical Christian groups were generally proscribed by the end of Constantine's reign (for example, in *Codex Theodosianus* XVI. 5. 1 quoted *ibid.* item 278, 320). Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius' edict of 380 (*Cod. Theod.* XVI. 1. 2, quoted Stevenson [1989] item 112, 150) commanded that Catholic Christianity be the religion of all Roman subjects, and paganism was effectively given the status that Christianity had held a century earlier with an edict of 391, outlawing pagan acts of worship (*Cod. Theod.* XVI. 10. 10, quoted *ibid.* item 114, 151).

[41] Antony (who is traditionally said to have lived AD251-356) was the founder of the monastic movement in Egypt. Athanasius' account of Antony's life, written c. 357-8 was the first written life of a Christian hermit , despite Jerome's attempt to trump Antony with his *Vita Pauli*, ostensibly the life of a man who preceded Antony. See Meyer (1950), pp3-15 and Waddell (1998), 3-6, 30-34. It should be remembered that while Athanasius' account of Antony's amazing life did not *invent* the monastic movement, it did a great deal to popularise it.

Christians[42]. As such, a narrative of conversion in one of these stories is unlikely to serve an evangelical purpose. The hagiographies preach to the converted.

Many of the hagiographies of male monks relate the story of conversion in very cursory terms, if at all[43], which is not surprising if the emphasis of the story does not lie on the conversion, but rather on the example of the ascetic hero's deeds.

However, the three stories in book I of the *Vitae Patrum* that deal with prostitutes[44] turned nuns all have the conversion of the heroine as a major component of the plot. Even *Thaïs*, which is by far the shortest of the lives in the *Vitae Patrum*, has a longer account of the heroine's conversion than many of the male saints.

Unsurprisingly, the account of Thaïs' conversion is still brief, and doesn't follow the psychological model referenced above (crisis/incubation/verification/consolidation)[45]. Thaïs already understands the truth as the author of the *Vita* sees it; she simply chooses not to live according to it, until damned by Paphnutius, which revelation throws her into immediate submissive repentance.

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[42] For a survey of some of the intentions behind hagiographical narratives, see Aigrain (1953), 235-246.
[43] For example, see the *Vita Pauli*, where Paul the Hermit simply becomes a Christian and goes off to become a monk (Waddell [1998], p 35); *Vita Antonii* 2, where much the same happens (Meyer [1950], 19); the life of Pachomius is marginally more complex, since it - very briefly - describes his conversion as a child (ch. 2-3 in *PL*73 col. 231). Postumius' conversion, on the other hand, is no more narrated than that of Antony and Paul (*ibid.* col. 429).
[44] There is a fourth, *Vita Mariae Meretricis* - but this deals with a young girl running away from a life of eremitic solitude to become a prostitute and then being brought back, and has little in common with the other three stories. It can be found in *PL* 73 cols. 651-660, cap. 368-373, and translated in Waddell (1998), 197-209.
[45] See pp 24-5 above

quod cum Thaïs audisset prouoluta ad pedes Paphnutii monachi cum lacrymis exorabat dicens poenitentiam iniunge pater confido enim remissionem te orante sortiri...

When Thaïs heard him say this, she prostrated herself at the feet of Paphnutius the monk, and cried, and begged, saying, "Inflict penance upon me, Father; for I am sure that forgiveness will be gained by your intercession![46]

Thaïs' submission is total. even when Paphnutius informs her that she will be allowed nowhere other than the floor of the room for her urine and excrement, and orders her not to either say the name of God or raise her "defiled" hands. but rather to simply repeat the one phrase over and over again.

cum autem discederet ostio plumbato ait ad illum Thaïs quo iubes pater ut aquam meam effundam? at ille respondit in cella ut digna es. cumque iterum quemadmodum Deum oraret requireret dicit ei non es digna nominare Deum nec in labiis tuis nomen diuinitatis eius adducere sed nec ad coelum manus expandere quoniam labia tua iniquitate sunt plena et manus tuae sordibus inquinatae sed tantummodo sedens contra Orientem respice hunc sermonem solum frequenter iterans qui plasmasti me miserere mei.

And when he had sealed up the doorway with lead, and was about to leave, Thaïs cried out to him: "Where do you suggest, Father, that I should let my water flow?"

And he replied: "in your cell, as you deserve."

And when she asked in what manner she should pray to God, he said to her, "You do not have the right to say the name of God, nor to bring the name of His divinity to your lips, nor to raise your hands to heaven, because your lips are so full of evil, and your hands have been defiled with sin. But you should only sit and look towards the east, only ever repeating this phrase again and again: 'You who made me, have pity on me'."[47]

Thais gives in, and proceeds to do exactly as Paphnutius orders, for about three years non-stop. What is Paphnutius doing all this time? No answer is given. The text simply jumps forward three years.

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[46] *VSTM* 1, col. 661B

[47] *VSTM* 2, col. 661C-662A.

The rewards for Thaïs' actions are indirect. Brother Paul, set by Antony to pray about whatever it is that is bothering Paphnutius (who appears to have now completely forgotten about Thaïs), has a vision.

> itaque cum singuli secessissent et incessanter orarent abbas Paulus maior dicipulus sancti Antonii uidit subito in coelo lectum pretiosis uestibus adornatum quem tres uirgines clara facie fulgentes custodiebant. cum ergo ipse Paulus diceret non est largitio haec alterius nisi patris mei Antonii. uox ad eum facta est non est patris tui Antonii sed Thaïsis meretricis est.
>
> And so, when each of them had withdrawn to his cell and began to pray continually, Abbot Paul, most senior of Saint Antony's disciples, suddenly saw in the heavens a bed, draped in beautiful bedding, which was guarded by three virgins with shining faces. So Paul said: "This could be a gift to the fathers from none other than my Antony."
>
> But a voice spoke to him: "This is not to the Fathers from your Antony, but from Thaïs the prostitute."[48]

Paul's immediate reaction is to assume that his vision is something to do with Antony, and it is only after being informed by Heaven's inevitable bass-baritone that he realises that the bed is symbolic of the actions of Thaïs the prostitute.

Thaïs' bed, although in reality "strewn with expensive bedding"[49] was defiled by her promiscuity. Now, the bed, a signifier of Thais' sexuality/sexual identity, becomes a thing of great beauty in a symbolic sense, even while Thais herself sleeps in her own excrement. The bed in the vision is attended by three virgins, the most obvious interpretation of this being a symbolic representation of Thaïs' three years of chastity, sealed inside the cell. Now Thaïs' sexuality corresponds to that expected to that of a holy woman, and her penance is done.

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[48] *VSTM* 3, col. 662B

[49] *Tunc ille ingressus, ut lectum pretiosis uestibus stratum conscenderet. VSTM* I, col. 661A.

Thaïs' sexuality, as a prostitute, is of course the defining problem of her existence. As we will also see from the other two hagiographies discussed below that, although as the saying goes, it 'takes two to tango', the assumption is that the responsibility for the licentious and lascivious behaviour of the prostitute and her clients lies wholly at the door of the prostitute.

> quod cum audisset senex, dicit ei et scis esse Deum? cui illa respondit et Deum scio et regnum futuri saeculi necnon et tormenta futura peccatorum. dicit ei si ergo haec nosti cur tantas animas perdidisti ut non solum pro tuis sed et pro illorum criminibus reddita ratione damneris?
>
> When the old man heard this, he said to her, "And do you know God?"
>
> "I know both God and the coming kingdom," she replied, "and all about the torments in store for sinners."
>
> "why then," said the man, "if you know this, do you destroy so many souls, so that you are damned not only by your own crimes but for their crimes also?"[50]

Paphnutius is, of course, simply expressing the opinion of many Christian thinkers of the period[51].

Paphnutius returns to the cell and finds Thaïs unwilling - or possibly *unable*[52] - to leave the cell.

> ...Paphnutius discessit et reuersus ad monasterium in quo fuerat inclusa ostium quod obstruxerat dissipauit. illa uero ut adhuc ita permaneret inclusa postulabat cum uero aperuisset ostium. dixit ei egredere quoniam remisit tibi Deus peccata tua. illa respondit testor Deum quia ex quo hic ingressa sum omnia peccata mea ad uelut sarcinam statui ante oculos meos et non discesserunt peccata mea ab oculis meis sed flebam illa

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[50] *VSTM* 1, col. 661B.

[51] For a survey of the church fathers' views on the laying of blame for sexual sin, see Cloke (1995), 28-31. John Chrysostom believed that since sin was ultimately in existence in the first place due to the first woman, Eve (see, for example, *Homily on I Timothy* IX [I Tim 2:11-15]), therefore women were more prone to be sinful.

[52] I find a chilling plausibility in this story; if Thaïs was indeed sealed in her cell for three years, it is wholly possible that in these circumstances, the repetitive action of the prayers would have both broken her mentally and have become the primary reason to continue to live. This is all, of course, conjecture.

> conspiciens. cui abbas Paphnutius ait non propter poenitentiam tuam remisit tibi Deus sed quia horum cogitationem semper habuisti in animo. et cum eam inde eduxisset quindecim tantum diebus Thaïsis uixit et sic pausauit in pace.
>
> ...Abbot Paphnutius left, and returned to the convent where the woman had been imprisoned, and unsealed the door. When he had opened the shutter, she demanded that she stay forever imprisoned, so he said to her: "Come out, for God has forgiven your sins."
>
> "I call God to witness," she replied, "that since I came in here I can see all my sins before my eyes as if they are on a plate. My sins do not leave my sight; and I weep constantly from seeing them."
>
> "God has not forgiven your sins because of your penitence," Abbot Paphnutius said to her, "But because the thought of these things has always been in your mind." And he led her out of that place. Thaïs survived for another fortnight. Then she died peacefully.[53]

Paphnutius, in effect, tells Thaïs that it isn't in fact her penance that saved her at all, but rather the *attitude* under which she undertook it. The reader of Late Antiquity is assumed to grasp the point of the story - Thaïs' salvation is a result of her utter submission; the reward of the surrender of identity. By ceasing to be the independent and aggressive woman that she used to be (in fact, by even ceasing to be a functioning human being), and becoming subject to the order of her (male) superior, following his orders, no matter how difficult, *without question*, Thais gains the attention and respect of Heaven.

Paphnutius states that Thaïs is a greater sinner than her clients, living for her own pleasure.[54] Thaïs, although bought and sold by men, is outside male control, under the

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[53] *VSTM* 3, col. 662B-C.

[54] de Voragine (tr. Ryan 1993), adds an interesting postscript to his own treatment of Thaïs' story: "Abba Ephrem wanted to convert another courtesan in the same way. When this woman tried shamelessly to entice Saint Ephrem to sin, Ephrem said to her: 'Follow me!' She followed him to a place where there was a crowd of people, and he said to her, 'Lie down so I can copulate with you!' 'How can I do that,' she said, 'with all these people standing around?' 'If you are ashamed before men,' he said, 'should you not be much

authority of neither a father or a husband. As such, her ultimate submission to Paphnutius' authority makes her a particularly apt signifier of the message presented in the story[55].

Here, the prostitute, in her denial not only of her social deviance, but also, in fact, of any human interaction at all, does "the right thing", finding redemption in her position as a chaste submissive[56]. Thaïs' conversion is (given the presupposition TMIAR) a moral exemplar for the reader. The deviant (here the prostitute) can find a place in the social order of the hagiography, the price being that the deviant's sense of self must be erased, replaced with a blind unquestioning obedience, a willingness to follow any commandment, even unto the point of death. Thaïs' conversion serves this purpose: it demonstrates the loss of Thaïs' identity, the transformation from confident and masterly courtesan into tearful submissive, the instant and irrevocable destruction of the individual's personality.

Although Thaïs knows something of Christian belief[57], it would perhaps be reading too much into the text to imagine that Thaïs is labouring under a guilty conscience. Although

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more ashamed before God, who reveals the secrets of the dark?' The woman walked away in confusion" (vol. 2, 235).

[55] I owe this point to Dr. Morgan.

[56] Perkins (1995, *passim)* argues that Christian hagiographic narratives subvert the traditional social order (as expressed, for example, in the Greek romance), replacing it with a new social order that turns the old order on its head, conceptually including the poor and the suffering. This new order still needs to be affirmed (Perkins [1995] 214-4). However, in both the traditional Grace-Roman social order and the new order of the hagiographies, there are still people who are 'beyond the pale'; one of the most obvious of these being the prostitute, whose attitude needs to be drastically altered in order to conform with any societal norm, whether Romano-Christian or Pagan Graeco-Roman.

[57] *...dicit ei et scis esse Deum? cui illa respondit et Deum scio et regnum futuri saeculi necnon et tormenta futura peccatorum* ("He said, 'And do you know God? to which she replied, 'I know both God and His kingdom in the age to come, and I know especially about the torments in store for sinners'". *VSTM* 1, col. 661B. The main characteristic of Thaïs' understanding of Christian doctrine seems to be a belief in Hell, suggesting it to be an aspect of Christian doctrine that particularly informed the author.

Thaïs is aware that God sees all and damns the sinful, it is the stern condemnation of Paphnutius that triggers Thaïs' immediate and absolute conversion. There is no crisis here, no period of incubation, no period of consolidation, simply the conversion.

The *Life of Thaïs* is much later than the *Metarmorphoses* of Apuleius and roughly contemporary with Augustine's *Confessions*. While far less complex than either of these conversion narratives, Thaïs' story does reflect one important literary antecedent - that of the Apostle Paul in *Acts* 9: 3-19.

> And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus.- and suddenly there shined about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.[58]

The blinding flash of light and disembodied voice that greet Saul on the road to Damascus prompt an immediate transformation; Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle to the gentiles in the blink of an eye. Saul, blinded, falls from his horse, and the question he asks is "Who art thou, Lord?"

Already, even before its identity is confirmed, the disembodied voice of Jesus is *Lord* to him; this is the moment of conversion. There is no process here. Saul transforms, like Thais, from an implacable enemy of the Church (however differently conceived in the two texts: in *Acts* an underground movement, in the *Life of Thaïs* the prevailing social order) into its unquestioning servant, a servant ultimately destined to suffer and die.

> But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.[59]

Both Thaïs and Saul know something of Christian doctrine, but no guilt for their actions is imputed until the actual point of conversion; the conversions of Paul and Thaïs are triggered, beginning, middle and end, by an authoritative voice, although, of course, the trigger of Thaïs' conversion is the voice of a stern and elderly ascetic, while the trigger to Saul's is the voice of Christ Himself.

Thaïs' story is a clear example of the simplest kind of conversion narrative; the convert is presented as an example for the reader to follow. While the author would be clearly insane to expect every reader to go into a convent, seal themselves inside a cell and kneel in an ever-increasing puddle of her own by-products whilst repeating a single phrase over and over again, the message of Thaïs' story is clear (particularly, one feels, if the reader is female), and is expressed by Paphnutius at the close of the narratives.

The kingdom of Heaven is not gained by suffering, if the unnameable author of the *Life of Thaïs* is to be believed (thus keeping this story from being an overt advertisement for asceticism), but rather by an attitude of complete submission. Heaven is gained by the deletion of the individual.

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[58] *Acts* 9: 3-6 (KJV).
[59] *Acts* 9: 15-16 (KJV).

i. 2. 2. *pelagia:* antiochene beauty

The most accessible of the three lives I have chosen is the tale of Pelagia[60].

The bishop of Antioch calls together a council of bishops, among whom is Nonnus, Bishop of Edessa, and his companion, James the Deacon, the narrator (and alleged writer) of the story. Whilst teaching the monks one day, Nonnus witnesses the passing by of the most beautiful actress in Antioch.

> cunctis uero nobis admirantibus sanctam doctrinam eius ecce subito transiit per nos prima mimarum Antiochae ipsaque est prima choreutriarum pantomimarum sedens super asellum et processit cum summa phantasia adornata ita ut nihil uideretur super ea nisi aurum et margaritae et lapides pretiosi nuditas uero pedum eius ex auro et margaritas erat cooperta: cum qua maxima erat pompa puerorum et puellarum in uestibus pretiosis amicta et torques aurea super collum eius. quidam praecedebant alii uero sequebantur eam pulchritudinis autem decoris eius non erat satietas omnibus saecularibus hominibus. quae tamen transiens per nos totum impleuit aerem ex odore musci uel caeterorum suauissimorum odoramentorum fragrantia.
>
> As we were all of us wondering at his holy teaching, look, suddenly there passed before us the most important actress in Antioch, best of the ballerinas and the dancers. She was riding on an ass and she rode adorned with height of ostentation, so that nothing could be seen of her beneath the gold and the pearls and the precious stones; and the nakedness of her feet was covered over with gold and pearls. With her was a great train of boys and girls dressed in very expensive clothes, and there was a torque of gold around her neck. Some walked in front of her and some went behind, but of her beauty and loveliness there could never be enough for all the men in the world. As she passed

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[60] The original Saint Pelagia is traditionally held to have died in AD 290, although Nonnus was bishop of Edessa between 449-451 and from 458 (Waddell [1998], 183-4). Thus, we can only really say with certainty that *VSPM* was composed, at the earliest, in the latter half of the fifth century. Pelagia's feast day is 8th October. Brock and Harvey (1987, 40) identify her as a fictionalised version of a character first described by John Chrysostom, as does Aigrain (1953), 151 & 251. Delehaye (trans. Attwater, 1998), 150-1 also lists a number of stories with an uncanny similarity to *VSPM*. The suggestion that Pelagia may be a Christianised Aphrodite is dismissed by Brock and Harvey (*op. cit.*) and Attwater (1998), 143 and 150-5; Aigrain, as part of a general discussion on the mythologising of saints, phrases the point forcefully: "...comment sainte Pélagie ne serait-elle pas Vénus en personne, l'Aphrodite dont on sait qu'elle était née de l'écume de la mer puisque la mer en grec s'appelle *pelagos*? (on ne pense pas à rechercher si la fête du 8 octobre à Antioche déjà traditionelle au temps de John Chrysostom y prêchait, est bien explicable dans cette hypothèse)...La méthode n'a pas toujours été portée à des excès aussi voyants et pour dire le mots, aussi ridicules; elle n'en demeure pas moins dangereuse, car, si la caractère fabuleux d'une Passion dont faire reléguer la martyr parmi les mythes , il faudra convenir que Saint Laurent, Saint Sébastien ou Sainte Cécile, dont les actes plein de fictions et impossibles à faire entrer dans une chronologie qui se tienne ne sont décidement pas de documents d'histoire, n'ont pas plus de realité que Ricquet à la Houppe."

between us, the whole air was filled with the smell of musk and all of the other sweetest fragrances that exist.[61]

Most of the bishops turn away in disgust, but Nonnus stares at her great beauty, afterwards asking the assembly of his colleagues if they did not notice how beautiful she was. The refusal of the bishops to reply throws Nonnus into a fugue of despair; retiring to his lodgings with James, he laments that a prostitute can care more for her beauty than a monk can care for his God.

...percutiens pectus suum lacrymabatur dicens Domine Iesu Christe ignosce mihi peccatori et indigno quia unius diei ornatus meretricis superuenit ornatum animae meae. quali uultu respiciam ad te? aut quibus sermonibus justificer in conspectu tuo? non enim occultabo cor meum ante te quoniam prospicis secreta mea. et uae mihi peccatori et indigno quoniam ante altare tuum assisto et non offero pulchram animam qualem expetis a me. illa enim promisit placere hominibus et fecit et ego promisi tibi placere et mentitus sum propter pigritiam meam. nudus sum tam in coelo quam in terra non adimplens praecepta mandatorum tuorum. ergo non est mihi spes ex operibus bonis sed spes mea in misericordia tua qua confido saluari.

Beating his breast, he cried out, "My Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me, a sinner and an unworthy man, because the dressing of a prostitute for one day outdoes the preparation of my soul! With what kind of face can I look upon You? Or with what kind of talk could I justify myself in Your sight? I will not hide my heart from You, for You see into my hidden places. Woe to me, a sinner and an unworthy man, because I stand in front of Your altar, and do not offer up the fair soul that You ask of me. For she has promised to please men, and has done so; but I have promised to please You, and I have lied because of my laziness. I am as naked in Heaven as I am on Earth, for I have not done the things asked by Your commandments. And so, my hope is not in good works. My hope is in Your pity, in which I trust to be saved.[62]

That night, Nonnus has a dream:

...dicit ad me uidisse se in somnia quomodo ad cornu altaris staret nigra columba multis sordibus inuoluta quae circumuolabat me et fetorem ac squalorem sordium eius ferre non ualebam. illa uero circumstetit me donec dimissa est oratio catechumenorum. postquam uero proclamauit diaconus catechumenis procedite statim nusquam comparuit. et post missam fidelem et completionem oblationis cum dimissa esset ecclesia egrediente me limitem domus Dei uenit denuo ipsa columba multis sordibus inuoluta et iterum circumuolabat me. ego uero extendens manum apprehendi eam et iactaui in concham quare erat in atrio sanctae ecclesiae et dimisit in aqua omnes sordes suas quibus obuoluta erat et ascendit de aqua candida sicut nix quae et uolans in excelsum ferebatur et omnino ab oculis meis sublata est.

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[61] *VSPM* 2, col. 664B.
[62] *VSPM* 4, col. 665C-D.

> ...he said to me that he had seen, in a dream, standing at the horn of the altar a black dove, covered in all kinds of filth. "It began to fly around me," he said, "and I could hardly bear its stink and its filthy state. It stayed around me, until the prayer for the catechumens was finished. After that, the deacon proclaimed to the catechumens, 'Go forth', and the dove was nowhere to be seen. The mass for the faithful and the oblation were completed, and the church was dismissed, and while I was crossing the threshold of the House of God, the same dove, covered with all kinds of filth, came back and again began to fly around me. Putting out my hand, I caught it and thrust it into the font that stands in the vestibule of the holy church. All the filth that had covered it was dissolved in the water, and it rose from the water white, like snow. It flew away, and was carried up into the heavens. Then it was carried out of my sight."[63]

This dream is prophetic: Nonnus is to be instrumental in the purification of the prostitute from her 'filthy' sins; she will then go beyond his reach, and ultimately will gain heaven.

Unsure of what this dream means, Nonnus goes to the cathedral, it being Sunday, and is asked to preach. By divine providence, the actress comes and visits the church for the first time on that very day. Convicted of her sin by Nonnus' preaching, the actress requests to meet Nonnus; he agrees, on condition they are not alone. Meeting him, she falls at his feet and begs for baptism. After some discussion concerning the actress's sincerity, Nonnus agrees to her making confession and receiving baptism, entrusting her to the care of a chaste matron named Romana. Nonnus then asks her name, and is told that although she is known to the people of Antioch as Pearl (*Margarita*, 'Margaret')[64], her real name is Pelagia.

Pelagia is baptised. That night, Pelagia is approached by the Devil himself, who is somewhat annoyed at having lost such a useful servant. He tries to tempt Pelagia, but is successfully driven away by the now-regenerate actress. Pelagia then disposes of all of her wealth,

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[63] *VSPM* 5, col. 666A-B.

giving it to Nonnus, who distributes it to the poor and hungry, save for a small amount which she gives to her slaves, all of whom she sets free. A week later, Pelagia puts aside her baptismal gown, takes one of Nonnus' hairshirts and one of his outer cloaks, and disappears off to Jerusalem, where she builds herself a cell.

Three years later, James decides to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Nonnus asks him to say hello to a hermit called Pelagius for him. James seeks out Pelagius and passes on the message, not recognising Pelagius to be Pelagia, her body being so wasted by starvation and poverty as to be completely unrecognisable.

> ...et inueni eum in monte Oliueti ubi Dominus orauit in modica cullula undique circumclusa et paruam fenestellam habuerat in pariete. et percussi ostium fenestellulae et statim aperuit mihi et cognouit me ego uerum non cognoui eam. quomodo enim poteram cognoscere illam quam antea uideram inaestimabili pulchritudine iam faciem marcidam factam prae nimia abstinetia? oculi uero eius sicut fossae uidebantur
>
> I came across him on the Mount of Olives, where the Lord prayed, in a modest little cell closed off on all sides, except for a little window in the wall. I banged on the shutter of the little window, and at once she opened it and recognised me, but I did not recognise her. How could I have possibly recognised her since when before I saw her, she was incredibly beautiful, and now her face was wasted from starving herself? Her eyes looked like pits in her face..[65]

Shortly after, James returns to converse with 'Pelagius', only to find 'him' lying dead in 'his' cell. James returns to Jerusalem and announces that 'Pelagius' is dead.

> ...nuntiaui commanentibus quod sanctus Pelagius monachus mirabilia faciens requieuisset. tunc sancti patres uenerunt cum diuersis monasteriis monachorum et sic solutum est ostiolum cellulae et delatum est foras sanctum corpusculum eius quod auro et lapidibus pretiosis condigne posuerunt. et dum sancti patres ungerent corpus myrrha tunc cognouerunt quod fuisset mulier: qui uolentes miraculum abscondere sed populum ipsum latere non poterat exclamauerunt uoce magna dicentes gloria tibi Domine Jesu Christe qui multa diuitias absconsas habes super terram non solum uiriles sed etiam muliebres.

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[64] *ciues uero Antiochae Margaritam me uocant*, *VSPM* 8, coll. 668B.
[65] VSPM 14, col. 670A-B.

> ...I announced to those living together there that the holy Pelagius, the monk and worker of miracles, now slept. Then, the holy fathers came, along with the monks from all the different monasteries, and they opened the little shutter of the little cell, and they carried his little body out into the open, considering it as precious as gold and jewels. And when the holy abbots embalmed the body with myrrh, they found out that she was a woman. They wanted to hide the miracle, but it could not be hidden from the people, who cried out in a loud voice, "Glory to You, Lord Jesus Christ, who has many hidden riches above the Earth, and not only with men, but also even with women!"[66]

Here the story ends.

Unlike Thaïs' story, Pelagia's story is highly romanticised[67]. The writer is given as James the Deacon of Edessa, who is both the narrator of the story and a character within it; James is immediately more involved in the story and more personally visible than the invisible narrator of *VSTM*. While *VSTM* recounts a series of events, and *VSMAM* (as we shall see) places more emphasis than is perhaps necessary on the sin and suffering of its heroine, *VSPM* falls somewhere between the two, offering a simple moral exemplar while being written with the enjoyment of the reader in mind.

Pelagia's story is something of a hagiography in soft-focus; more emphasis is placed on style and on beauty than on suffering and sin. Far more emphasis is placed, for example, on Pelagia's beauty when she first appears, for example, than on her eventual state (where, in the end, she is so haggard that she can pass for a man with little difficulty). Compare the

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[66] *VSPM* 15, col. 670C-D.

[67] Pelagia's life is translated and condensed from a Greek original. There also exists a Syriac version, which is the earliest witness to the text, translated in Brock and Harvey (1987) 40ff. The Syriac life is significantly longer (51 chapters to the Latin text's 15). Despite this, the narrative is more or less identical, and it is, in my opinion, a credit to the Latin translator that the same things are said in less than a third of the space. Some parts are slightly different: when Pelagia first appears in the Syriac text, she is not naked and bejewelled as in the Latin, but dressed in clothes which are scandalous because they resemble a man's (ch. 6, *ibid.* p 43); also, in the Syriac, Pelagia not only recognises James, but is pleased to see him, welcoming him in and preaching to him (ch. 46, *ibid.* p 60). One can't help thinking that the Latin text makes more logical sense here.

relative lengths of the descriptions of Pelagia the prostitute in *VSPM* 2 and of Pelagius the monk in *VSPM* 15, quoted above on pages 49 and 52 respectively.

Speech is rhetorically composed, and descriptions are rich. Satan himself makes an appearance. Emotions run deep. There is far more joy and sadness in Pelagia's story than in Thais', and as much as in Mary of Egypt's, which is about three times as long. It is the prettiest of the three stories.

The morality embedded in Pelagia's story comes from a different source from the other hagiographies reviewed here. As argued above, Thaïs' story is characterised by a sudden transformation precipitating a complete surrender to monastic authority and the ultimate deletion of the individual's personality. On the other hand, Pelagia's conversion is dependent upon the free will and individual personality of the convert.

Pelagia's conversion has some of the characteristics of Shumate's model[68]; the actual conversion is preceded by an existential crisis and followed by a period of consolidation. However, in *VSPM*, the conversion process has a rather unusual spin: the period of existential crisis is not actually undergone by the convert herself. Nonnus, having witnessed Pelagia's otherworldly beauty and wealth and the reaction of his colleagues, has a crisis in Pelagia's stead[69].

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[68] See p 24ff. above.
[69] *VSPM* 4, quoted above p 49.

It should be stated that Nonnus' behaviour is never less than exemplary (again: TMIAR). He avoids any accusation of wrongdoing, while blessing and encouraging Pelagia's choices...

> quam sancta Romana flebat amarissime et sanctus Nonnus consolabatur eam dicens noli flere filia sed laetare gaudio magno quoniam Pelagia optimam portionem elegit sicut Maria quam Dominus praefert Marthae in Euangelio.
>
> The Holy Romana wept very bitterly, and Saint Nonnus comforted her, saying. "Don't cry, my child, but rather rejoice greatly in God, because Pelagia has chosen the best way, just like Mary, whom the Lord preferred to Martha in the Gospel."[70]

...and he correctly guesses her identity as the hermit, even though James the narrator doesn't.

> dum me permissit ire dicit ad me tibi dico frater diacone dum perueneris lerosolymam require ibi quemdam fratrem Pelagium monachum et eunuchum qui multos annos habitabat in solitudine clausus quasi eum uisitaturus uere enim poteris ab eo iuuari. haec autem omnia dicebat mihi de ancilla Dei Pelagia non manifeste.
>
> He allowed me to go, but said, "Brother Deacon, I'll tell you this: when you arrive in Jerusalem, look for Brother Pelagius, the monk and eunuch, who has lived there for some years in solitude and seclusion, and if that's the case, visit him. You might gain something from him." But I didn't realise that he was talking to me about Pelagia, the handmaiden of God all the time.[71]

Nonnus is, arguably, even more instrumental to the conversion of Pelagia than Paphnutius is to Thaïs.

Nonnus' crisis does not stem from the state of the actress's[72] soul, but from his recognition that the woman's maintenance of her great beauty is qualitatively superior to the maintenance of his own faith. Ultimately, this foreshadows Pelagia's fate: she dies, her beauty wasted away but supplanted by a rule of faith and humility, now superior by far to

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[70] *VSPM* 12, col. 669D.
[71] *VSPM* 13, col. 670A.

former cosmetic excellence. While Nonnus' crisis does not, at first, appear to have anything to with the conversion of the Antiochene actress, it nevertheless prefigures it and, as far as the narrative is concerned, serves the purpose of a pre-conversion crisis.

A second, much more obvious, foreshadowing of Pelagia's conversion comes with Nonnus' dream of the same night[73]. The dove's beauty, sullied by filth, is revealed when Nonnus forcibly baptises it in the font. Pelagia puts aside her finery for the robes of a male hermit, abandoning her pursuit of the physical. Pelagia finds true and incorruptible beauty by allowing her own beauty to fade; the point obviously being that of spiritual beauty and physical beauty, the former is the one to be sought.

When Satan comes to tempt Pelagia, he asks why she wasn't happy with the riches she had.

> et iterum repetens ad neophytam puellam dixit haec mihi facis domina mea Pelagia et tu meum ludam imitaris? ille enim gloria et honore coronatus et apostolus constitutus tradidit Dominum suum ita et tu mihi fecisti. tunc dicit ad eam sanctus Nonnus episcopus: signa te cruce Christi et abrenuntia ei. quae signauit se in nomine Christi et insufflauit in daemonem et statim nusquam comparuit.
>
> And saying these things again, he [*the Devil*] said to the new convert, "My lady Pelagia, are you doing this to me and copying my own Judas? For he was crowned with glory and honour and appointed as an apostle, and betrayed his Lord, and this is what you have done to me." Then Saint Nonnus the bishop said to her, "Make the sign of the Christ's Cross and send him away." And she made the sign in the name of Christ and breathed on the demon, and at once he was nowhere to be seen.[74]

There is no answer to the devil's question. The Devil is simply dismissed. It would ultimately be more satisfying for the critic if some pronouncement was made concerning

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[72] Although Pelagia is referred to as *meretrix* in the title and by Nonnus in *VSPM* 4, she is introduced as *mima* (actress), and numbered among the *pantomimae* and *chorieutriae* (different orders of dancers).
[73] *VSPM* 5, quoted p 50 above.
[74] *VSPM* 9, col. 668D.

the relative value of material gain, but the point is sufficiently made by Pelagia's subsequent actions: she sells all of her possessions and gives the profits to Nonnus to be given to the poor, and she sets free her slaves with the means to support themselves, offering them the choice of joining her as Christians.

That Pelagia advises her former slaves to look to the state of the their souls[75], but does this in the form of an exhortation rather than an order, is telling of the doctrinal difference between *VSPM* and *VSTM*. While Thaïs, on her conversion, hands over all claim to her own will and follows the authority of the monk to a cruel and unusual extent, Pelagia not only retains her own free will but in fact makes all her own decisions. Paphnutius comes to Thaïs and damns her; Pelagia, convicted of the truth of the Gospel by Nonnus' preaching, chooses to come to Nonnus. Thaïs is ordered into the cell and sealed inside; Pelagia steals a set of Nonnus' clothes and runs away to Jerusalem to make her own cell. The rule of Thaïs' solitude is imposed by Paphnutius (and Thaïs meekly submits to it); the rule of Pelagia's solitude is imposed by no one but herself.

While physical beauty, sexual promiscuity, and conspicuous wealth are placed in a qualitatively inferior position to the ascetic lifestyle, it is again the attitude of the ascetic that determines the effectiveness of his/her faith, and hence an actress can have some sense of moral superiority over a monk; although it is stressed that the way of the monk is infinitely preferable.

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[75] *VSPM* 14, col. 670B.

However, it should be noted that in one way, Pelagia is in a qualitatively inferior position to Nonnus, and in fact to any of the monks in the story: she's a woman.

Like Thaïs, Pelagia is ultimately to blame for the ensnarement of men[76], to the extent that Nonnus will only meet with Pelagia if chaperoned:

> attamen dico tibi ne uelis tentare humilitatem meam ego enim sum homo peccator seruus Dei. si pro certo habes desiderium diuinitatis uirtutem adipiscendi et fidem et me uis uidere sunt mecum episcopi alii; ueni et ante eos me uidebis nam sola me uidere non poteris.
>
> Nevertheless I say this to you, don't try to tempt my weakness, for I am a man who is a sinner and a servant of God. If you really do have a desire to obtain the virtue of divinity and if you want to see me, there are other bishops with me. Come, then, but you shall not see me alone.[77]

And, of course, it is even necessary in the end for Pelagia to become a man, leading to the comment that it is "even" possible for God to do His good work through a woman[78].

Physical beauty, sexual promiscuity, conspicuous wealth, and of course gender, are placed in a qualitatively inferior position to the (masculine) ascetic lifestyle. However, Pelagia's penance, it must be stressed, is entirely Pelagia's choice. She, like Thaïs, does "the right

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[76] See n.49 above p 42, and Cloke (1995), 198.
[77] *VSPM* 7, col. 667B.
[78] *VSPM* 15, quoted above p 52. Cloke (1995), 193-197, also argues that female cenobites were wont to pose as men for other reasons (e.g. for safety), although *VSPM* itself contains no explicit statement of any other reason for Pelagia's new male identity.

thing" (i.e. she becomes a monk and becomes a man), but, unlike her fourth-century predecessor[79], Pelagia does "the right thing" *of her own free will.*

In Pelagia's world, the ascetic is still superior to the layman, but the example of *VSPM* is, unlike *VSTM*, not to submit one's will to authority, but rather to *choose* the right path to take.

[79] *VSTM* predates *VSPM* by approximately a century.

i. 2. 3. *mary of egypt* - bigger/better/holier/more

This, the last of the three stories I have chosen, is the most complex in terms of plot and by far the longest.

We are introduced to a Palestinian monk called Zosimas, who is faultless in every respect:

> hic itaque Zosimas ab initio in uno Palestiniorum conuersatus est monasterio et omnem pertransiens monachicam disciplinam in abstinentiae opere omnium factus est probatissimus. omne enim praeceptum sibi traditum canonis ab his qui ab infantia educati sunt luctam perfectae disciplinam monachicae irreprehensibiliter conservabat. multa enim et ipse sibi adiiciens superaddidit cupiens carnem spiritui subiugare. nec enim in aliquo offendisse comprobatur. ita enim fuit in cunctis perfectus monachicis actibus ut multoties multi monachi de praedicti loci monasteriis et de longinquis partibus ad eum confluentes eius exemplis atque doctrinis se constringerent et ad illius imitationem abstinentiae se multo magis subiugarent.
>
> And so, this Zosimas lived in one Palestinian monastery from the very beginning, and surpassing all in the monastic disciplines, was, as far as deeds of self-denial were concerned, was the best of the monks. The rules he lived by were all drawn from the canons from which he had been taught since a child. He kept without fault the complete monastic rule. In fact, he added many things to it, imposing things upon himself, desiring to subordinate the flesh to the spirit. He was not proven to have fallen short in any way. And so he was faultless in all of his monastic duties, to the extent that many monks, both from this monastery in Palestine and from further afield flocked to him time and time again, and emulated his example and his teachings, so that, in imitation of him, they might subject themselves to much greater abstinence.[80]

Eventually, Zosimas decides that, since he is as good as he can possibly be, he must go and find a better monastery, eventually finding one near the Jordan. Every Easter, the monks in the monastery by the Jordan go on retreat into the desert. During his first Easter retreat, Zosimas meets a strange, naked old woman, her skin blackened and her hair whitened by the sun.

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[80] *VSMAM* 1, col. 673A-B.

dum autem psalleret et in coelum inspiceret intentis obtutibus uidit a parte dextra ubi orabat umbram quasi humani corporis apparentem et primo quidem conturbatus est ac contremuit phantasiam alicuius spiritus existimans se vidisse signo autem crucis se muniens et a se timorem proiiciens iam enim et orationis eius finis instabat convertens oculos vidit aliquem in veritate properantem ad partem Occidentis. mulier autem erat quod videbatur corpore nigerrimo prae solis ardore denigrata et capillos capitis habens ut lana albos modicos et ipsos non amplius quam usque ad cervicem descendentes.

And while he chanted, and looked to the sky in intent contemplation, he saw on the right hand side, where he prayed, a shadow which looked like it had the shape of a human body. And first, he was upset by this, and trembled, thinking that he saw a vision of some unholy spirit. He protected himself with the sign of the cross and dismissed fear from himself. Then he stood fast and even finished his prayer. He turned his eyes away, and saw somebody approaching for real, from the West. And it was a woman that he saw. Her skin was very black, tanned by the heat of the sun, and the hair on her head was a cloudy white, and short, and like wool; it fell no further than the neck. [81]

Although she runs away, Zosimas catches her. She begs him not to look at her, but Zosimas, desperately curious, asks her to stay and converse with him.

Abba Zosima ignosce mihi propter Deum quoniam manifestare me tibi conversa non possum. mulier enim sum et omni corporeo tegmina nuda ut ipse uides et corporis turpitudinem habens intectam. sed si uis peccatrici mulieri orationem uere tribuere proiice mihi indumentum quo circumdatus es ut possim muliebrem infirmitatem operire ad te conuertens et tuas accipiam orationes.

"Forgive me, Father Zosimas, for God's sake, for I cannot turn around and show myself to you. For I am a woman, I am bare of bodily covering, as you can see, carrying the dishonour of an uncovered body. But if you wish to hear the prayer of a sinful woman, throw me the garment that covers you, that I might cover over my womanly weakness, and turn towards you. Then I will accept your prayers. "[82]

It is interesting to note that the writer of this story[83] still considers the sight of a naked old woman, whose beauty has been explicitly destroyed by the sun, to be enough to inspire the old man to sin. Again, this seems to be thought of by the author as the woman's fault[84].

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[81] *VSMAM* 7, col. 677A

[82] *VSMAM* 11, col. 677D-678A.

[83] Given in the text as Sophronius, Bishop of Jerusalem, AD 635-6. This places *VSMAM*'s date of composition in the seventh century at the earliest.

[84] See n. 51 above p 43.

They pray, and Zosimas witnesses the old woman levitate. Startled by this, he asks her who she is.

> ego pater patriam quidem Aegyptum habui parentibus autem meis uiuentibus duodecimum agens aetatis annum affectum illorum spernens Alexandriam ueni et quomodo uirginitatem meam in primis uiolauerim et qualiter indesinenter et insatiabiliter uitio libidinis subiugata iacuerim erubesco considerare. hoc enim non breue est dicere illud autem citius dicam ut possis cognoscere insatiabilem vitii mei ardorem quem habui in amorem stupri. decem et septem et eo amplius annos transegi publice in incendio iacens luxuriae. non propter alicuius donum uirginitatem meam perdidi neque enim ab aliquibus dare uolentibus aliquid accipiebam hoc enim libidinis furore succensa considerabam ut amplius ad me facerem currere gratis implens stupri mei et sceleris desiderium. neque uero consideres quia pro divitiis nihil accipiebam mendicans enim uiuebam aut multoties stuppam filando. desiderium enim ut dixi habebam insatiabile ita ut indesinenter me in sterquilinio luxuriae volutarem. et hoc mihi erat placabile et hoc uitam existimabam si indesinenter naturae iniuriam peregissem.
>
> My homeland, father, is Egypt. My parents were still living and I was eleven years old when I rejected their love and came to Alexandria. There, I am ashamed to think of how I lost my virginity as soon as I could, in whatever way I could, and how utterly and willingly I lay in thrall to lust. To tell you about these things would take a long time, so I will tell them to you briefly, so that you can understand the undying passion for my sin, and my love of debauchery. For seventeen years, I lived my life, lying in a public blaze of sensuality. I did not lose my virginity because of a gift from someone. I took nothing from those who wanted to give anything; for now that the madness of passion had been kindled, I reasoned that I would make it run to me all the more, and for free I filled up the needs of my sexuality and my desire for evil. And don't think I took nothing because I was rich! No, I lived by begging, and, more often than not, by weaving flax. As I have said, I had an insatiable desire to wallow continually in a sensual dung-heap. And I found this pleasurable, and I thought that this was the life, as long as I unceasingly caused injury to my soul.[85]

It is interesting to note that the woman's antics as a prostitute trump both those of Pelagia and Thaïs in terms of sheer sinfulness. Not only does Mary say that she actually *enjoyed* sexual intercourse on a regular basis, but that she enjoyed it so much that she did it for free![86]

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[85] *VSMAM* 13, col. 680A-B.

[86] See Cloke (1995) 51-3 for thoughts about sexual desire and women. Note also that while Mary's absconding to Alexandria was certainly aberrant behaviour, her loss of virginity at the tender age of eleven was not.

Zosimas' interlocutor continues her story: having one day decided, she says, to join a large number of people on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Mary, unable to pay for her fare, secured her passage by granting sexual favours to her fellow travellers while on the journey.

dixi ei uere frater naulum uel sumptum non habeo. uadam autem et ascendam in unam nauim quam conduxerant. et licet renuant memetipsam tradam corpus enim meum in potestate habentes pro naulo accipient. propterea autem cum eis uolui ambulare abba meus ignosce ut multos haberem cooperatores in meae libidinis passione. dixi tibi mi domine senex ignosce mihi ne compellas me meam dicere confusionem. contremisco enim novit Dominus maculant enim et ipsum aerem isti sermones mei. Zosimas autem terram lacymas infundens respondit ad eam dic proter Deum o mater mea dic et ne praetermittas sequentia tam salutiferae narationis. illa autem adiungens priori narrationi additit haec ille autem adolecens audiens sermonum meorum obscuritatem ridens discessit. ego autem fusum quem manu tenebam proiiciens hunc enim post tempusconveniebat me tenere cucurri ad mare ubi illos perspexi currentes et uidi iuvenes aliquot in littore stantes numero quasi decem satis corpore vultuque acerrimos et ad id quod mihi erat placabile optimos. erant autem et alii qui iam naues ascenderant. impudenter autem ut mihi consuetudo erat in medio eorum me irruenter dedi dicens accipite et me uobiscum quo pergitis non enim ero uobis implacabilis. sed et alios sordidores proferens sermones omnes ad ridendum commovi. illi autem inerubescentem motum meum videntes accipientes me in nauiculam portauerunt. exinde autem nauigationem coepimus. quae autem post haec acta sunt quomodo tibi enarrare potero o homo Dei? quae lingua dicere potest uel auris ualet audire ea quae in nauicula uel itinere facta sunt? quomodo ad peccandum et uolens miseros ego compellebam nolentes. non est narrabilis sed inenarrabilis nequissima species cuius tunc sum infelicibus magistra sceleribus effecta. ergo nunc satisfactus esto quia stupesco quomodo meas mare illud sustinuit iniquitatem luxurias quomodo terra non aperuit os suum et infernum uiuentem me demersit quae tantas in laqueum mortis induxi animas.

"And I said, 'But, brother, I don't have price of the fare. And I shall go and board one of the ships that they have hired. If they don't let me, I will give them myself. They will take my body, to do with as they will, as my fare.' And so I wanted to go with them so that I might have many who would couple with me in my sensual passion. Forgive me, Father Abbot, I say to you, my lord, my elder, forgive me, and do not make me speak of this. For the Lord knows that I shudder at the thought that my talk might stain the air itself." Zosimas poured his tears upon the ground, and replied to her: "Tell it, Madam, tell it on account of God. Don't leave out anything that follows in your story, which is so very edifying." So she continued her story, and added this to it: "That young man, hearing how base my talk was, went away laughing. And I threw away the spindle that I held in my hand (for it was past the time that I should have been holding it anyway) and ran to the sea, where I saw the travellers running. And I saw a few young men standing on the beach, maybe about ten of them, with strong bodies and keen faces, and they were fine, in respect of what gave me pleasure. They were there with other people who had already boarded the ships. Without any shame at all, as was usual for me, I eagerly threw myself among them, saying, 'Take me with you to the place where you are travelling, and I will pleasure you!' And then, as I made other, lewder suggestions, they began to shake with laughter. But they saw my shameless gestures, and they took me with them. And they carried me on board that little ship. And so, we began to travel on our voyage. But as for what happened after that, how can I tell you of it, man of God? What tongue could tell or what ear could bear to hear about what was done on

that journey in the little ship? I was willing, and I forced those poor unwilling men into sin. It cannot be told. It is an indescribable picture of absolute degradation, of which I was made mistress by my wretched sins. Now let you be satisfied, for I am amazed that the sea carried the evil of my sensuality, and because the earth did not open its mouth and plunge me alive into the fire of Hell, I who led so many souls into the snare of death."[87]

Having arrived in Jerusalem, the young prostitute tried to join the pilgrims in communion[88], but was supernaturally denied entry to the church again and again.

ut enim limina uestigio contingebam omnes interius recipiebantur nullum habentes impedimentum me autem solam non recipiebat sed quasi militaris multitudo esset taxata ut mihi ingredienti aditum clauderet ita me repentina aliqua prohibebat uirtus et iterum inueniebar in atrio. hoc ter et quater passa et facere conans nihilque proficiens desperans de caetero et amplius nusquam progredi ualens factum quippe fuerat corpus meum a ui comprimentium ualde confractum recedens discessi et steti in quodam angulo atrii templi et uix aliquando ob quam causam prohibebar uidere uiuificum lignum in cogitationem reduxi. tetigit enim mentem et cordis mei oculos intellectus salutis recogitans quia squalida actuum meorum scelera mihi introeundi aditum obserabant. coepi itaque flens nimium conturbari et pectus tundere atque suspiria de profundo cordis proferens et gemens eiulansque prospexi in loco in qua stabam sursum imaginem sanctae Dei genitricis stantem et aio ad eam intendens et indeclinanter attendens Domina virgo quae Deum genuisti secundum carnem scio quia nec condecens nec opportunum sit me sic horridam adorare imaginem tuam uel contemplari oculis tantis sordibus pollutis quae esse uirgo dignosceris et casta quae corpus et animam habes immaculatam iustum est me luxuriosam a tua purissima castitatis munditia abominari et proiici. tamen quoniam ut audiui ob hoc effectus est Deus homo quem ipsa digna genuisti ut peccatores uocaret ad poenitentiam adiuva me solitariam et nullum habentem adiutorium percipe confessionem meam et mihi licentiam tribue ecclesiae patefactum ingredi aditum et non efficiar aliena a uisione pretiosissimi ligni in quo affixus Deus homo quem concipiens ipsa uirgo peperisti et proprium sanguinem dedit pro mea liberatione. iube o Domina et mihi indignae ob diuinae crucis salutationem ianuam patefieri et te ex te genito Christo dignissimam do fideiussorem qui nunquam ultra meam carnem coinquinabo per horrida immistionum ludibria sed mox ut filii tui Virgo sancta uidero lignum saeculo et actibus eius et omnibus quae inimico sunt renuntio et continuo egredior ubicunque ipsa ut fideiussor me duxeris. haec dicens et quasi aliquam satisfactionem recipiens fidei succensa calore et de pietatis uisceribus Dei genitricis praesumens moui me de eodem loco in quo stans feci orationem et ueniens iterum ingredientibus me miscui et ultra non erat qui me repelleret neque qui me prohiberet appropinquare ianuis quibus in templum introibant.

And so, I barely touched the step of the threshold. All the others were received inside, having no obstacle, while the church did not receive me alone. But the crowd was like a column of soldiers and closed up my entry, as I tried to go in. And so, the power

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[87] *VSMAM* 13-14, col. 680C-681A.

[88] Reference is made in the subsequent passage to "life-giving wood"; this refers to the Catholic and Orthodox practice - still in effect in some parts of the world - of incorporating a holy relic of some kind in the altar, thus combining the act of communion with the 'adoration' of the relic. In this case, the church's altar contains a piece of the True Cross.

somehow kept me out again, and again I was stuck in the front porch. I tried to do this a third and a fourth time, and made no progress. I despaired of a fifth try; my body was bruised and sore from the force of the pressing masses. Making no further progress, I gave up and retreated, and stood in a corner of the cathedral porch. Eventually and reluctantly I began to think about why exactly I was denied a vision of the life-giving wood. The understanding of salvation touched my mind and the eyes of my heart, because I realised that the obscene and wicked things that I had done were blocking up the doorway, so that I could not enter.

I was deeply disturbed, and I began to cry and beat my breast, and moaned from the depths of my heart. While I wailed and groaned, I saw in the place where I was standing, a vision of the Holy Mother of God standing above me, and I looked up at her and did not turn away and I cried, "Holy Virgin, who gave birth to God in the flesh, I know that it is not seemly or right for me to pray to your awesome image or to look with eyes polluted with filth upon you who are known to be a virgin, and in chastity keep your body and soul free from stain. It is right that you should detest me, a debauched woman, and cast me from the spotless fortress of your chastity! But I have heard that God was made a man (whom you yourself worthily bore) because of this: that he might call sinners to repentance. So help me now, for I am alone and have no one to speak on my behalf! Take my confession, and grant me permission to go through an open door into the church! Let me not be a stranger to the sight of that most precious wood, on which was nailed God as a man, whom you conceived and bore as a virgin and who gave his own blood so that I might be set free. Ask, My Lady, and let the door of salvation from the Holy Cross be opened to me, unworthy that I am! You are most blessed, for Christ was born of your body, and I shall make this vow to you: I will never again defile my flesh, by taking part in the doings of wildness and wantonness. Soon, Holy Virgin, when I will see the wood of your son I will renounce this world and its deeds and everything that is your enemy, for you, and I will spend the rest of my life keeping to that vow. And from now on I shall go wherever you lead me."

When I had said this, it was as if I had received some kind of answer to my plea, and I burned with the heat of faith. I trusted in the good faith of the Holy Mother of the flesh of Christ, and I moved from that place where I had stood to make my prayer. And approaching again, I mingled with the people going into the cathedral, and there was nothing before me to push me back, nor to keep me from approaching the door by which they were entering the church.[89]

If the sudden inexplicable desire to join a pilgrimage to Jerusalem represents an existential crisis, the above episode is essentially both the young prostitute's period of incubation/despair and moment of conversion, condensed in to one brief period. Certainly, what followed was a long period of consolidation, since, led by the Virgin, the woman

[89] *VSMAM* 16-17, col. 681D-682C.

entered the desert where she has remained ever since, with no clothing, and with no food apart from three loaves of bread, which lasted her seventeen years[90].

The woman tells Zosimas to return to the monastery, and to say nothing to anyone about her. She asks him to come back in a year's time with the sacraments of communion, for she has not taken communion since the day of her conversion.

Zosimas agrees and meets her again a year later, bringing the communion sacraments and a small basket of food. He witnesses the old woman cross the Jordan by walking on the water. She gratefully takes communion, but refuses to take any food except for three lentils, which she eats on the spot[91]. She asks him to do the same the following year. But the following year, Zosimas loses his way, and is, as a result, very late. He finds the old woman dead.

By her body is a note written in the sand, telling him her name (Mary) and asking him to bury her. This is another miracle, for she has already told Zosimas that she could not read or write. Zosimas is unable to bury her because the ground is so hard. However, a lion appears, and begins to lick Mary's feet; Zosimas realises that the lion is sent from God to bury her; he asks the lion to do so. It obliges and retreats into the desert[92]. Zosimas returns

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[90] *VSMAM* 18, col. 683B-D.
[91] *VSMAM* 22, col. 686D-687C.
[92] *VSMAM* 26, col. 688B-689A.

to the monastery and tells the monks Mary's story, and they praise God. Zosimas lives to be a hundred years old and dies in the monastery by the Jordan[93].

Mary's story, written a long time after the other two hagiographies in this sample[94], is representative of hagiography in its most developed form.

The story, in many ways, takes the form of an hermeneutic game. The eponymous heroine makes no appearance until chapter 7, and her story proper does not begin until chapter 12. We are not even informed of the woman's name until chapter 25 (although, of course, her name is given away in the title), when Zosimas finds the miraculous epitaph written on the ground next to the saint's corpse.

The text plays other games with the reader. Thaïs is simply told she is a sinner[95]; Pelagia, when asked to confess her sins, simply says that they are too many to list and that she would rather not, if it's all the same. It is for God to forgive, she says, and Nonnus lets it go at that[96]. Mary of Egypt, on the other hand, when asked by Zosimas to give some account of her sins, refuses - but then, when pressed by the monk, tells Zosimas (and, therefore,

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[93] *VSMAM* 27, col. 689A-690B.

[94] The Jesuit Heribert Rosweyde (d.1629), who edited the texts within the *Vitae Patrum*, also includes annotations giving the traditional attributions and most probable histories of all the texts in the collection. According to Rosweyde, the action of *Mary of Egypt* is supposed to have happened in around AD 520, while the author Sophronius is assumed to be the Sophronius who was bishop of Jerusalem in AD 635-636. The Latin translation, made by Paul the Deacon of Naples, is dedicated to Charlemagne, and therefore must date to the late eighth century. Thus, this text straddles the division between Late Antiquity and the medieval era. See Rosweyde's annotations to *VSMAM* in *PL73*, cols. 689C and 690B respectively.

[95] *VSTM* 1, col. 661B.

[96] VSPM 8, col. 668A.

the reader also) *exactly* what she did[97]. Mary's previous career as a sexual athlete is described in such a way that it is a reasonable assumption that these experiences are recounted not to edify, but rather to entertain[98].

While on the one hand *VSTM* sends the reader directly to the moral of the piece, and *VSPM* also does so (albeit in a slightly more ornate fashion), on the other hand, *VSMAM* takes the reader on a roundabout route. Mary's story is told in flashback, while a substantial portion of the text deals with the life and opinions of Zosimas. Zosimas' place in the narrative is even more prominent than the roles Paphnutius or Nonnus, and it will be argued that Zosimas, and not Mary, is the protagonist of the text and its moral exemplar. Mary undergoes a conversion, but in his own way, Zosimas also undergoes a conversion of understanding, and it is with Zosimas that the reader is encouraged to identify.

Mary's own conversion occupies a central point in the narrative (it occurs in chapter 17). Up to this point, the narrative has been dominated by Zosimas' story (until chapter 11) and the graphic description of Mary's early life, told in flashback. When her conversion has taken place, Mary, having taken holy communion once, drops everything and purchases three loaves of bread, the only things she takes with her on her trip to the desert[99]. Mary's conversion does follow Shumate's model thus: *crisis (period of searching)* - Mary's need to travel to Jerusalem with the pilgrims, her need to enter the church; *incubation (despair)* -

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[97] Again, *VSMAM* 13-14, col. 680C-681A.

[98] Pervo (1987), writes: "Popular works were doubtless often *edifying*, the quality Haenchen found dominant in Acts. They were also frequently intended to *entertain*, an object that did not at all diminish their value for illumination and improvement" (p 13, italics Pervo's own).

Mary's failure to enter the church, her wish for forgiveness; *conversion* - the vision of the Virgin; *consolidation* - the taking of communion and the flight into the desert. However, Mary is distanced from the reader, the reader is never really encouraged to identify with her as they are with Thaïs and Pelagia.

Mary's travails in the desert seem unreal, the stuff of outright fantasy compared to the grim plausibility of Thaïs' imprisonment or the romanticised but believable starvation of Pelagia. While Thaïs and Pelagia perform one "onstage" miracle each (the vision of the bed[100] and the dismissal of Satan[101], respectively), Mary exists in a strangely unreal world, where miracle is almost commonplace. Mary levitates[102]; Mary walks on water[103]; Mary makes three loaves of bread last seventeen years[104]; Mary is magically prevented from going into the church by the Virgin, whom she meets in person[105]; Mary's epitaph appears on the ground despite Mary's illiteracy[106]; Mary quotes the Bible despite never having been taught anything about the scriptures[107]; Mary is buried by a divinely-sent lion[108].

In fact, Mary appears to be everything that the classic miracle-working saint *should* be: a hermit, a reformed sinner, converted by a miracle, surrounded by miracles, and with a

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[99] *VSMAM* 17, col. 683B.
[100] *VSTM* 3, col. 662B.
[101] *VSPM* 9-10, col. 668D-669A.
[102] *VSMAM* 9, col. 679A.
[103] *VSMAM* 23, col. 687D.
[104] *VSMAM* 19, col. 683D.
[105] *VSMAM* 16, col. 681D-682A.
[106] *VSMAM* 25, col. 688B.
[107] *VSMAM* 20, col. 685B.
[108] *VSMAM* 26, col. 688D-689A.

miracle for an epitaph. Mary's story is almost too good to be true. It appears to live up to every expectation that an ancient/medieval reader could bring.

In Mary's story, the conversion of the heroine is simply another miraculous event in a cavalcade of wonders; the tale has become so formulaic that the conversion is there because it *has* to be there (and the more spectacular the better), just as much as the vision of the Virgin *has* to be there, just as much as Mary's youthful sins *have* to be there, just as much as there *has* to be a part with a friendly lion - and so on, because by the time that Mary was written, the hagiographic narrative was so established as a literary form (with its own rules and clichés), that it had become possible to write a "definitive" hagiography. *VSMAM* is, in a way, an attempt at this "definitive hagiography".

However, notwithstanding the formulaic natureof its contents, the strategy and structure of *VSMAM* remains remarkably complex. The key to this complexity lies in the portrayal of the monk Zosimas.

Zosimas begins the narrative as a monk of unmatched character, who comes to the opinion that there is no one who has achieved the heights that he has achieved in the monastic disciplines. It would be a mistake to assume that the writer is necessarily assuming Zosimas to be anything other than a good Christian. On the contrary, it is presented in the

beginning of the narrative as an entirely reasonable conclusion to which Zosimas could come [109].

Zosimas is the best monk around, *as far as he knows.* A vision appears to Zosimas, validating his conclusion and his decision to go out and see if this really is the case, and telling him exactly where to go.

> haec et his similia eo cogitante astitit quidam et dixit o Zosima bene quidem et sicut possibile fuit homini decretasti bene cursum monachicum consummasti. tamen nullus est in hominibus qui se perfectum esse demonstret. maior enim lucta praesens quam illa quae praeterit licet tu nescias. ut autem cognoscas quantae sint et aliae uiae salutis egredere de terra et de cogitatione tua et de domo patris tui ut Abraham ille patriarcharum eximius et ueni ad monasterium quod iuxta Iordanem adiacet flumen.
>
> While he was thinking these things and things like them, a man stood before him and said, "Zosimas, you have decided well, and as far as it is possible for a man to achieve, have lived a good life as a monk. However, there is no man who can show himself to be perfect. For there exists a struggle greater than that which went before, although you do not know about it. But if you would know how many are the other ways to salvation, leave this land and your comtemplation and your father's house, as did Abraham the exalted patriarch, and come to the monastery which lies next to the River Jordan."[110]

Zosimas is the best monk there is, and as such, is not arrogant so much as desperate to find someone who can teach him something; in fact, as the section quoted above implies, his desire to find something better actually shows his *humility.* The angel who advises Zosimas to go to the monastery by the Jordan phrases his advice thus: *if you would know how many are the other ways to salvation, leave this land.* He of course speaks not only to Zosimas, but to the reader, since Zosimas' journey is not only physical, but epistemological; the reader shares this epistemological trip.

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[109] Zosimas ("Elder Zossima") is, in fact, also a saint of the Orthodox Church. His feast day is April 4th. See *VSMAM* 1, col. 673A-B, quoted in part on p 59 above.
[110] *VSMAM* 2, col. 674A-B.

While Mary's story, with its formulaic components, fails to engage with the reader, Zosimas' story does, and it is with Zosimas that the reader is encouraged to identify. At the end of the narrative, Zosimas is a changed man, by dint of the fact that he has been in contact with Mary of Egypt and has heard her story.

> ille autem cum magna festinatione respondit stupor enim nimius inuaseret eum in tam glorioso miraculo et dixit uere non mentitur Deus qui pollicitus est sibi similes esse eos qui semetipsos purificant. gloria tibi Christe Deus noster qui ostendisti mihi per ancillam tuam hanc quantum mea consideratione inferior sum mensura uerae perfectionis.
>
> He was overwhelemed with wonder at such an amazing miracle and quickly replied, "God did not lie when He gave those who purify themselves the right to become like Him. Glory to you, Christ our God; you show me through this handmaiden of yours just how inferior I am in my contemplation to the true measure of perfection.[111]

In some respects, however, he isn't really changed at all. The story ends with Zosimas going back to the monastery and telling everyone about the dead saint; they all rejoice at the story[112]; then Zosimas goes right back to being perfect. Zosimas hasn't really been converted to anything himself. He was as perfect as a monk could be to begin with and remains as perfect as a monk can be at the end. What has changed in Zosimas is that he has *learned* about Mary of Egypt. Zosimas' near-perfection has, in effect, given him the right to hear Mary's story and the right to disseminate it; he is privileged to hear the story. Zosimas' privilege is shared by the reader. The hagiography is a special thing to him, as it should be to the reader - hence Zosimas' injunctions to the saint that she should leave nothing out of her story.

> obsecro te per Dominum Iesum Christum uerum Dominum nostrum qui de uirgine nasci dignatus est pro quo hanc induta es nuditatem pro quo has carnes expendisti ut

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[111] *VSMAM* 22, col. 687A-B.

[112] *VSMAM* 27, col. 679A-680B. See also Zosimas' exhortations to Mary to tell as complete a story as possible in ch.14, col. 680D and 18, col.684A; also Zosimas' queries in ch. 19, col. 684D and 20, col. 685B.

> nihil abscondas a seruo tuo quae es et unde et quandouel ob causam solitudinem hanc inhabitasti sed et omnia quae circa te sunt edicito mihi ut Dei magnalia facias manifesta. sapientia enim abscondita et thesaurus occultus quae utilitas in utrisque sicut scriptum est? dic mihi omnia propter Deum nec enim pro gloriatione aut ostentatione aliquid dicis sed ut mihi satisfacias peccatori et indigno.
>
> I beg you in the name of Our Lord, Jesus Christ Our True Lord, who saw fit to be born of a virgin, in whose name you go naked, in whose name you have used up your life, I beg you, hide nothing from your servant! Who are you? Where are you from? And why are you here? Why do you live in this wilderness? Tell me everything about yourself, so that you might make known the mighty works of God. For, as it is written, what use is there in either hidden treasure or buried wisdom? In God's name, tell me everything; don't say anything out of pride or boasting, but that you might give satisfaction to me, an unworthy sinner.[113]

Later, we shall see how Augustine uses the idea of privileged information to make his story more convincing; here, the idea is similar. Hagiography is, the author would have us believe, valuable and:

i. deserves attentive reading;

ii. is to be learned from.

Zosimas embodies both of these points. As the best of the monks, he is thus an *exemplary figure* (and an exemplary reader), and as such is a character whose example we are implicitly encouraged to follow. Zosimas is, in effect, an object lesson for the experience of hagiography: a saint's story is presented to him and he is highly attentive and learns a valuable lesson from the story. He *is* converted, in a way, since his new understanding of God's grace is life-changing - and it is he whom the reader is encouraged to emulate.

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[113] *VSMAM* 11, col. 679B-C.

Mary of Egypt's story is hagiography on a second level; now that the expectations of the hagiographic narrative are such that a tale like Mary's inevitably corresponds with a recognised formula, a new level of understanding (and thus of teaching) must be found. As we have seen, *VSTM* and *VSPM* both offer their heroines to the reader as examples of how to behave in the light of a transforming Christian faith (i.e. either in complete submission or in willing sacrifice, respectively). *VSMAM*, however, does not. Instead, it is Zosimas whom we are encouraged to emulate, as he is listens with rapt attention to the telling of a story of conversion and learns from it.

In Zosimas, we are presented with an object lesson in how to read hagiography.

part 2: apuleius and augustine

ii. the mystery play

ii.1. the *metamorphoses* of apuleius: an unconventional conversion

> The king spake, and said, Is this not great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?
> While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is deserted from thee.
> And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.
> The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchanezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.
> And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:
> And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say to him, What doest thou?
> At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.
> Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth and his ways judgement: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.[1]

The Golden Ass (or *Metamorphoses*) of Apuleius is a comic fiction, dealing, on the most superficial level, with the misadventures of Lucius, its narrator, who dabbles in magic, is transformed into a donkey, suffers, and is transformed back again. The manner of transformation back to man, of course, is the obvious reason why this work should attract the attention of a study focussing on narratives of conversion, for at the beginning of the eleventh book of the Metamorphoses, Lucius is confronted by a vision of the goddess Isis, who informs him that she has come to rescue him from his fate, and who directs him towards a festival dedicated to herself. There he is given the roses he needs to consume in

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[1] *Daniel* 4: 30-37, KJV.

order to become human again, and a priest explains to him that his transformation into a donkey was a result of his "sacrilegious curiosity"[2], and that, since Isis has saved him, it is now up to Lucius to offer his life in its entirety to the goddess.

In the revelatory instant and the account of religious initiation that follows, Lucius' story ceases to be the story of a clown. It becomes the story of a Nebuchadnezzar, transformed into a beast by the will of the god, and transformed back again by the god in order to refine and to perfect the god's chosen subject.

The eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses* is, however one looks at it, slightly problematic. Suddenly, a work which to all intents and purposes was a comic novel of high quality, changes its form in mid-reading and forces the reader to look at it in a different way. Commentators have reacted in many different ways. Some see the Metamorphoses as a brilliantly-phrased allegory[3]; others have put forward the theory that Apuleius' work is simply a collection of tacked together pieces showing off the writer's virtuosity[4].

The issue is complicated somewhat by the fact that a large portion of the *Metamorphoses* (at least) is based upon an earlier Greek work, also called *Metamorphoses*.

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[2] *sacrilega curiositas* (*Metamorphoses* 11. 15).
[3] For example, Hägg (1983), 190; Reardon (1991) 45; Holzberg (1995) 82-3.
[4] Notably B.E. Perry (1967) 236-282 *passim*.

This work is no longer wholly extant, existing only in the form of a brief epitome called *Onos (Ass)*[5], which only includes the story of the narrator transformed into a donkey and back again (although in the *Onos*, the story has a very different ending, which is both abrupt and bawdy). Arguments about exactly how much of his *Metamorphoses* was drawn by Apuleius from his Greek predecessor are doomed to be inconclusive, because there is no conclusive evidence either way.

It is, however, generally agreed that however much of the *Metamorphoses* was drawn from the Greek *Metamorphoses* (or from other sources), and however much other parts of it may or may not have been influenced by the Greek *Milesiaka*[6], the ending is original to Apuleius[7], as is the long and ornate story of Cupid and Psyche occupying the central section of his work, and it is these two sections of the *Metamorphoses* which draw the most attention from commentators on Apuleius' work.

Of all the narratives of religious conversion featured in this study, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is unique, for a number of reasons.

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[5] The Byzantine editor Photios' *Bibliotheke* (cod. 129) references a lost work, entitled the *Metamorphoseis*, which he attributes to one "Loukios of Patrae" and states to be four books in length. Photios writes that "Loukios" has copied his first two books from the "work of Lucian called *Lucius or the Ass*" - or vice versa; it is now generally believed that *Lucius or the Ass* is actually an epitome of the Greek *Metamorphoseis,* rather than the other way round. See Holzberg (1995) 72-3; Perry (1967) 223ff; Mason (1999), 218-226.

[6] See Scobie (1969), 32-7; Slater (2001), pp217f; and S. Harrison (1998), 61ff. Of course, any speculation as to the content of the original Milesian Tales must remain as speculation, since they are no longer extant.

[7] Perry (1967), 244-5; Holzberg (1995), 73.

First, and most obviously, the story is a fiction, and does not even pretend to be anything else. While Augustine's *Confessions*, the Pseudo-Clementine Romance and the various hagiographical narratives of the *Vitae Patrum* are intended to be believed at some level, Apuleius' story is a fiction. It doesn't mean that it is not a serious work or without a moral[8] - simply that the story itself has no pretence of ever having happened[9].

Second, the *Metamorphoses* is a pagan narrative, while all the other stories examined here are Christian. The importance of this cannot be overstated. A different religious background not only brings with it different practices, different ideas, and different gods, it brings with it a completely different way of thinking. Paganism, unlike (for the most part) the Christianity of the first few centuries, is difficult to pin down, mixed up as it is with state observance, philosophical enquiry, old stories and new mysteries. The Paganism of Apuleius' era had an amount of baggage and variety of practice that the new Christian church would take several centuries to gather.

Of course, having said that, there is a great difference between the 'everyday' paganism of Apuleius' day and the mystery cults that began to enter the religious marketplace of the first century AD.

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[8] Although Macrobius didn't seem to think so, making a throw away reference to "the stories full of the imaginary doings of lovers in which Petronius Arbiter so freely indulged, and, surprisingly, with which Apuleius sometimes amused himself" (*Commentary on Cicero's* Somnium Scipionis, 1.2).

[9] For the purposes of this discussion, the defining feature of fiction is that both the author and the reader acknowledge it as factually untrue. Anything which is factually untrue but which tries to impose itself as true is an outright lie, not a fiction.

The mystery cults were, in some ways, analogous to Christianity in their appeal, inasmuch as they offered an individual, personal way of communing with God/the gods and a promise of a perfect afterlife. As such, the mystery cults stood slightly apart from the rest of the pagan world while, unlike Christianity, not invalidating or denying it.[10]

A second reason for the unique position of the *Metamorphoses* in this study is that the other stories of religious conversion studied here either narrate their defining conversion right at the beginning of the text, or contain an open assumption at the beginning of the text (or even in the title) that a religious conversion will occur[11]. On the other hand, the *Metamorphoses* gives little away to the reader, and while religious imagery is presented in various forms throughout the book, its significance is veiled; although the title *could* be translated as 'Conversions', and although there are undoubtedly hints[12], there is no reason to necessarily expect the epiphany of Isis as presented in book 11. The effect of the conversion of Lucius is ultimately a surprise to the reader, just as it is to Lucius himself.

These two points work together in the *Metamorphoses* to produce a work unequalled in ancient literature: the portrayal of God/the gods in the *Metamorphoses* and the various tricks played on the reader and the reader's expectations by Apuleius work together in the narrative. The reader accompanies Lucius in his various trials. Just as Lucius reaches the point where he is prepared to meet with Isis and become one of her priesthood - as do the

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[10] See pp 6-7 above.

[11] Even where this is not actually said, the fact that, for example, the title of *VSTM* (*The Life of Saint Thaïs the Prostitute/Vita Sanctae Thaïsis Meretricis*) refers to Thaïs as both 'Saint' and 'Prostitute' clues the reader into the inevitable conversion of the protagonist from one to the other.

protagonists of the other conversion stories in this study - so too the reader is, in a manner of speaking, brought to this position. Lucius does, as we shall see, serve as an example for the reader to follow or - more often than not - an example for the reader, ironically, *not* to follow. But the dynamic of the text more often locates Lucius as a different kind of exemplar - a companion whose experiences are shared by the reader.

There has been a reasonable amount of debate[13] on whether or not Lucius' conversion actually counts as a religious conversion or not. This is an important distinction - much of the discussion concerning Lucius' conversion has centred upon whether it would have been possible for Lucius, were he a real person, to have undergone the conversion he appears to undergo.

Arthur Nock, although denying that religious conversion was possible for pagans in Apuleius' day, then goes on to say that, for all intents and purposes, Lucius' conversion is the exception to this rule[14]. Nancy Shumate, in her 1996 work *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius'* Metamorphoses, spends a great deal of time firmly placing the *Metamorphoses* within a specific genre of conversion stories[15]. Keith Bradley argues that Shumate's model of conversion, which is itself a development of the theories of William James, is inappropriately applied to Apuleius. He makes the point that

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[12] See Griffiths (1978).
[13] Shumate (1996), 23-31, gives a useful overview.
[14] Nock (1933), 138ff.
[15] Shumate *passim*, but see esp. 7-13.

> neither the world of Apuleius' novel nor the real world in which he himself lived were worlds characterised by rival systems of religion[16].

And later, he points out that:

> There is no indication or even implication in the text... that Isis ever demands of Lucius an exclusive religious commitment, a turning away from divinities previously known, a rejection of the old religious life, a devotion to her alone. She is the only one able to prolong his life beyond its fated course, but that is different from taking her to insist on a life of exclusive religious allegiance from Lucius of the monotheistic sort.[17]

These are fair points. It is indeed true that there do not really seem to be opposing religious forces in Apuleius' work. It is also true that Isis does not explicitly demand any exclusive service from Lucius. However, as I shall try to show later in this study, there are two reasons why Lucius' narrative of conversion fits within a wider study of religious conversion.

First, this study does not address the sociological, psychological or religious aspects of Lucius' reformation except where they affect the representation thereof. Whether Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* comes from a world where a conversion to the worship of a pagan goddess actually happened or not, the narrative represents a fictional event which partakes of the characteristics of a religious conversion and engages with its reader as such, *regardless of whether this could have happened in real life*.

Second, it is my opinion that there is sufficient evidence within the text to support an argument that Lucius' conversion as represented does not signify the conversion of a man to the worship of one goddess alone, but rather, as this study will attempt to show, is

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[16] Bradley (1998), 318.
[17] *ibid*, 325.

symbolic of the finding of truth in true religion in a much more general sense. Of course, even within the terms of the fiction, it is clear that Lucius undergoes some sort of change which is embodied in his joining of Isis' cult; Whether or not the commitment proves to be - historically speaking - exclusive, does not really matter that much.

ii. 2. belief is easy

> tu uero crassis auribus et obstinato corde respuis quae forsitan uere perhibeantur. minus hercule calles prauissimis opinionibus ea putari mendacia quae uel auditu noua uel uisu rudia uel certe supra captum cogitationibus ardua uideantur quae si paulu accurantius exploraris non modo compertu euidentia uerum etiam factu facilia senties.
>
> You, with your thick ears and unbending heart, are spitting out something that may in fact turn out to be true. You are being damned stupid, if your insane opinions cause you to think false whatever seems new when you hear it, or raw when you see it, or whatever seems too difficult to the brain to grasp. If you give these things a little more accurate investigation, you will see that they are not only easily proven, but in fact easily done.[18]

Right from the very beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius makes it clear to us that 'there are more things' than we necessarily understand or credit.

Lucius, when faced with a storyteller and an incredulous listener, urges the willing suspension of disbelief; his arguments against disbelief, although comical, are convincing. Lucius tells of how, while he one day nearly choked to death on a mouthful of cheesecake, a sword-swallower he once saw was able to swallow an entire broadsword, right up to the hilt[19].

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[18] *Metamorphoses* 1. 3.
[19] *Metamorphoses* 1. 4. On Lucius' credulity to Aristomenes' story - and the reader's, see James (1987), 44-5.

The story is told in great detail, and it is this, along with the fact that it is reasonable to assume that most of Apuleius' readers have probably at least heard of a sword swallowing act[20], that makes his account so convincing.

The importance of this cannot be emphasised enough, for this is the first of the embedded narratives of the *Metamorphoses*. Its purpose seems to be to bring the reader to the point of willing suspension of disbelief. As Alexander Scobie says:

> I am inclined to think that the purpose of this description is more important than this. By giving an account of a *miraculum* which is physically possible, [Apuleius] prepares us for the acceptance of *miracula* performed by the witches in Aristomenes' story, which, in turn, is a prelude to the hero-narrator's own metamorphosis.[21]

And so, the first of the *Metamorphoses*' tales is, against one character's better judgement, told. It is difficult not to imagine the author himself speaking through Lucius' mouth at this point, urging the incredulous reader not to disregard the instructions and warnings given in his text. Here, before we have truly got the measure of him, Lucius serves as an example of how to act, just as much as, for example, Clement. Unlike the *Recognitions* or the hagiographies, however, which set up a character as a moral exemplar and consistently use him or her in that way, the *Metamorphoses* is not consistent in its treatment of its protagonist, who is unreliable in the extreme.

The character who in our other narratives of religious conversion would be the 'moral exemplar' is soon revealed to be a man - and, of course, later a donkey - who is insatiably curious, slow to catch the point of things, not afraid to use his sexuality in order to attain

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[20] Scobie (1975), 83ff.

his ends, and swift to make inaccurate sweeping judgements. As the narrative progresses, Lucius transforms into an inverse moral exemplar, an example of how *not* to do things. It could be reasoned that, since Lucius seems to be the example (at least up to the point of his conversion, and then maybe even further) of how not to approach life, then this injunction to believe is somehow treacherous.

However, a first-time reader of this story has no reason to assume Lucius to be a buffoon at this point. We naturally find ourselves agreeing with him[22]. By the time Lucius is shown to be the fool that he is, the instruction he offers to us has no baggage attached to it. By then, there are other images to instruct and lead us. And even if Lucius has ceased to be a positive example for us by the end of Book 1, the reader soon develops a connection with Lucius which is far more intimate, and just as powerful in drawing us into the plot of the novel.

ii. 2. 1. prophecies

> tua sunt ait Byrrhena cuncta quae uides.
>
> 'Everything that you see,' said Byrrhena, 'is yours.'[23]

At the beginning of *Metamorphoses* book 2, Lucius visits the home of his aunt Byrrhena. One of the first things he sees there is an astonishing tableau.

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[21] *ibid*, 85. See also Winkler (1985), 30.
[22] "Since we have opened the book to give it a chance, our operational premise coincides with that of the interested Lucius. In the debate between 'stop' and 'go', we as readers must side with 'go'." Winkler (1985), 29.
[23] *Metamorphoses* 2. 5.

The centrepiece of Byrrhena's *atrium* is a group of statues depicting the scene immediately preceding the death of Actaeon. Actaeon witnesses Diana from the bushes, unaware in his curiosity that he already undergoing the transformation from man to stag and that the dogs are coming for him. The tableau is impossible. Stone leaves hang from stone branches alongside stone grapes and stone apples above stone blades of grass. Stone hounds slaver beside a stone Diana who trips lightly on stone toes towards the viewer/narrator/reader with her stone garment fluttering behind her in the wind.

Like a film image trapped in bullet time, the group draws the viewer/narrator/reader in while being completely impossible without an intermediate layer of narrative. Obviously, an attempt to make a statue like that would end in disaster as the statue collapsed under its own weight[24]. In fact, Apuleius almost goes so far as to spell out to us the impossibility of Byrrhena's home when, during Lucius' second visit to the house, the narrator tells us:

> quidquid fieri non potest ibi est.
>
> Whatever could not exist... there it was.[25]

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[24] See Slater (1998), 27f.
[25] *Metamorphoses* 2. 19. See Laird (1997), 63ff.

The tableau's unreality (unreal because *too* real) takes on the characteristics of *hyper*reality, becomes a Platonic thought-form of curiosity, its archetype caught in time and transplanted into Byrrhena's hall. As a type of curiosity thrust before our vision, the tableau carries the implication of a warning to the curious. And, of course, by this point, the primary characteristic of Lucius has been established as *curiositas*[26]. If Actaeon is the type of *curiositas* and its inevitable consequence, then the warning is specifically directed at Lucius.

Byrrhena's statement, *tua sunt ait Byrrhena cuncta quae uides* makes this clearer to the reader, if not to Lucius. *Everything that you see here is yours* is, of course, a beautifully ambiguous statement. On the one hand, it could mean "the fate presented here is yours" (i.e. "this is going to happen to you"), but just as easily it could simply be a healthy expression of hospitality: *mi casa e su casa.* But whether this is a warning or not, Lucius doesn't notice it[27].

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[26] *Metamorphoses* 1. 2 (Lucius presses for Aristomenes' story); 2. 6 ("But I was already disposed towards curiosity...").

[27] See, for example, Schlam (1992), 49: "In a way, the statues speak a prophecy to Lucius, but he does not listen"; and Tatum (1 979), 38: "The implication of the sculpture depicting Actaeon's metamorphosis into a stag, escapes him completely, even though it is explicitly interpreted as a punishment of curiosity". Also Peden (1985), who goes on to suggest that the statues of Victory represent Lucius' own final transcendence over the dreadful fate represented by the Actaeon tableau, also noting that *Fortuna*, who will, of course, also be central to Lucius' experience, is also often depicted standing on a globe, and that *palmaria dea* is not explicitly named as either Victory or Fortune. As we shall see later, both Victory and Fortune fall under the remit of Isis, as "revealed" in *Metamorphoses* 11. 5. See also Griffiths, (1978), 141 and Sandy (1972), 179.

A more obvious warning comes in the following chapters of Book 2. Byrrhena informs Lucius that his host's wife Pamphile is a notorious witch, and that he should avoid having anything to do with her if at all possible. This has the same effect on Lucius as telling a child not to touch something would: Lucius immediately decides that he *must* find out more[28].

The warning of the consequences of *curiositas* therefore becomes more than a simple warning; it is also a condemnation. It has become the point at which Lucius' fate is sealed.

It could be asked whether a warning of punishment really constitutes a warning if it is a foregone conclusion that the warning will be ignored (or, in this case, not understood) and the malefactor will be punished. And of course, if such an occurrence were to be part of our 'real-life' experience, it would seem to us as if the one making the warning was somehow not 'playing fair'. However, in narrative terms, this perfectly serves the purposes of the plot.

What we are presented with here is a warning which *necessitates* its not being heard. Its appearance places the reader in an uncomfortable position. Thus, three interesting conditions arise:

1. The reader is assumed by the author to know the outcome of the warning, particularly in the *Metamorphoses*.

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[28]*Metamorphoses* 2. 6. James (1987), 73ff, considers Lucius' ambivalent attitude to Byrrhena, his ignorance of

2. The textual reader (that is, the reader assumed by the text)[29] may be assumed by the textual author (the author, as presented in the text) not to know the outcome of the warning, but then again may not be.

3. The narratee (the person to whom the narration is addressed, who may or may not be the same as the textual reader) is assumed by the narrator (the voice performing the narration, who may or may not be the same as the textual author) not to know the outcome of the warning.

The result of this is that the account of the warning is told by the narrator as if the *narratee* does not know the outcome (and of course in the case of Lucius, the narrator himself does not know the outcome either), while at the same time, the *reader* is assumed to know what happened. A bizarre kind of double-bluff results. An author who understands the tension that this creates often slips small hints, tiny clues, into the text. From the very beginning of the *Metamorphoses,* Lucius is doomed. On the road to Hypata, Lucius finds himself alongside two travellers, one of whom refuses to believe the story the other has just told. Prefacing his request with the phrase, "I'm not an inquisitive man, but..."[30] Lucius asks the traveller to tell it again. Again, in book 2, Lucius hears the awful story of Thelyphron, whose mutilation follows from his incaution with magic, and yet, Lucius, along with his

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her advice, and his downright rudeness to be representative of her position as a signifier of prudence. See also Sandy (1972), 180.

[29] More complete definitions of these terms can be found in Hijmans and van der Paardt eds. (1995), 7-14.

[30] *non sum curiosus, Metamorphoses* 1. 2. See DeFilippo (1999), 275.

fellow banqueters, finds the whole thing intensely amusing. He apparently fails to draw any moral from the sorry fates of Socrates and Thelyphron.

By the point of Byrrhena's party, Lucius' *curiositas* has been established and the subtle warning contained within the tableau is both the admonition and the condemnation that destroys him. Lucius' experience in Byrrhena's *atrium* is vague, but, as we shall see, the consequences it warns do come to pass.

It is interesting to note that prophecies, as represented in the *Metamorphoses*, seem to produce results which follow the same pattern, over and over again: they are made, they are disbelieved, they prove to have been accurate all along. In 2. 12, Lucius relates how he was once told by a Chaldaean astrologer:

> nunc enim gloria satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredundam fabulam et libros me futurum.
>
> ...that my reputation would grow a lot, but that I will be a long story, a tale that no one will believe, and a book of several volumes.

Lucius, unaware of what this prophecy will mean for him, is quite pleased with it, while Milo, Lucius' host, mocks and tells a story which, for him, proves the same Chaldaean's unreliability[31]. And yet, the reader holding the book is already aware that this prophecy must come true, whether the rest of this book has been read or not; and, of course, when the book is complete, the Chaldaean's prophecy proves to be completely true.

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[31] *Metamorphoses* 2. 13-14.

Later on, the girl Charite tells the old woman in the robbers' cave about a terrible dream she had, which portends disaster for her and her loved ones. The old woman replies by saying that she shouldn't worry, because dreams like this often predict the opposite event, and calms Charite down by telling her the story of Cupid and Psyche[32]. As it turns out, the old lady is wrong: the worst happens, and madness and death are indeed the fate the unfortunate girl[33].

And, near the beginning of the story of Cupid and Psyche, the princess's father goes to see the oracle of Apollo who, after consultation, delivers a prophecy that Psyche will be wed to a husband "fierce, cruel, like a snake"[34]. Of course, the king takes this prophecy at face value and despairs; Psyche's wedding train becomes a mourning procession. But an oracle's utterance is never to be taken on face value. Psyche's terrible husband proves to be Desire himself, and while all that the oracle said is, in a manner of speaking, true, the king and his family misinterpret it, as does Psyche, when, reminded of the original prophecy by her sisters, disregards the evidence of her own senses and falls from grace[35].

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[32] *Metamorphoses* 4. 27.
[33] *Metamorphoses* 8. 1-14.
[34] *sed saeuum atque ferum uipereumque malum*, *Metamorphoses* 4. 33.
[35] *Metamorphoses* 5. 19-21.

Genuine prophecies in the *Metamorphoses* - those which are given by an authoritative source[36]- invariably seem to come true, and yet are always either disbelieved or misinterpreted. The future is at once accessible and hidden to the characters of the *Metamorphoses*; accessible because it is within their grasp, hidden because they are doomed never to understand it.

While the author/textual author knows the truth behind each prophecy - he has to; after all, he *is* the author - and the narrator acts as if he doesn't[37], the position of the reader, the textual reader, the narrator and the narratee, on the other hand, varies from case to case. While the rough outcome of the Chaldaean's prophecy is made clear to the reader by the very act of holding the book, the outcome of Charite's dream and, to a lesser extent, the oracle's prophecy are hidden to the first-time reader, and are a surprise when they are revealed.

The one thing that might offer a clue to the reader about the contrary importance of Apollo's oracle is the statement that immediately precedes it:

> sed Apollo quanquam Graecus et Ionicus propter Milesiae conditorem sic Latina sorte respondit.
>
> But Apollo, although Greek and Ionian, replied in Latin, for the benefit of the writer of the Milesian tale.[38]

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[36] i.e. not, for example, the all-purpose prophecy of the catamite priests given in 9. 8, which is made up by the priests themselves purely for profit.

[37] Although, of course, the narration-within-the-narration of the Cupid and Psyche story adds an extra layer of complexity, as the narrated narrator implicitly knows how the story will end, while the narrating narrator acts as if he doesn't. James (1991), 161-2, suggests that Lucius is telling this story as an ass, although this is arguable.

[38] *Metamorphoses* 4. 32.

Immediately the reader's suspension of disbelief is shattered. The "writer of the Milesian tale" can only be Apuleius himself - or possibly Lucius[39] - which fact cannot possibly be known to the purported teller of the story, the mad old woman in the robbers' cave.

In my opinion, this serves two purposes. First, it is, of course, funny. But its second purpose, which cannot be overplayed, is that, like the bizarre unreality of Byrrhena's reception hall tableau, it shocks the reader out of a position of complacency by creating a fracture in the fabric of the narrative's reality.

Byrrhena's tableau is one of these accurate but disbelieved prophecies. As we are to see, Actaeon is a type to which Lucius will conform. Although he takes pleasure in the beauty and artifice of the statue group in Byrrhena's atrium, Lucius fails to see that it serves to warn him of his fate.

ii. 2. 2 punishment

In *Metamorphoses* 11, it is suggested to Lucius that his circumstances have been in the hands of "Blind Fortune", thanks to his "servile pleasures" and "unfortunate curiosity"[40].

The priest, whose name will be revealed as Mithras, has been informed of this in a dream; and Isis herself admits to having done this (as related in 11.6 and 11.13), although exactly

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[39] This depends upon the statement in *Metamorphoses* 1. 1 that the story is being told "in a Milesian mode", and whether or not this particular statement is to be put in the mouth of Apuleius or Lucius. See n. 6 above p 77.

[40] *ad serviles voluptates... improsperae curiositas. Metamorphoses* 11. 15. See Sandy (1972), 182.

what Isis said to Mithras is left unsaid. Judging by Mithras' words, the goddess has explained things to him in approximately the same way as she explained things to Lucius, leaving him, given his grasp of Lucius' situation, with the capacity to make for himself a perfectly reasonable interpretation of the facts. In fact, Mithras, given a detailed narrative of what has happened, could be thought of as being as aware of the facts as the reader of the book itself.

When Mithras has given his speech about the reasons behind Lucius' transformations, he falls back as if exhausted, in the manner of a prophet having uttered words of divine portent. Mithras' explanation of the story is both reasonable and authoritative, given the privileged state of the priest and the authority he gains within the story itself because of his oracular utterance[41]. In Mithras' view of the story, Lucius' sufferings have been his own fault, the punishment for a serious character defect. Lucius has sold himself into the hands of "blind Fortune", but has finally been rescued by Isis, described, metaphorically, as a "seeing Fortune" (11. 15).

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[41] The priest Sisimithres - bearer of a name with elements of both Isis and Mithras - in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* echoes Mithras in the *Metamorphoses*, serves a similar oracular purpose , offering a final, divine explanation of the romance's events in *Aithiopika* 10. 40.

Lucius has not been saved from the outer form of an ass - it was simply the act of eating a bunch of roses that allowed Lucius to regain his human form. Isis is described as having rescued Lucius from a *spiritual* state, of which his physical misfortunes have been merely the symptom. In a sense, Lucius has to be rescued from being an ass *inside* before he can be rescued from the body of an ass; to simply change him back would preserve his character defects and make it almost inevitable that he would suffer other indignities because of his stupidity[42].

Isis responds to Lucius' desperate prayer by offering him a way out of his suffering; however, her own explanation of events creates problems for a "scrupulous reader".

Isis' position within the story is problematised simply by her statement about who she is. In 11. 5, Isis claims the identity of no less than ten goddesses before saying her own name, including among these names the name of almost every goddess who has appeared in the book so far.

The "Pessinuntine Mother" is the same mother goddess worshipped by the *cinaedi* in *Metamorphoses* 8; Venus appears within the story of Cupid and Psyche, as do Proserpina, Ceres and Juno; and Diana, as we have seen, is the centrepiece of the Actaeon tableau in Book 2. Isis identifies herself with Hecate, the goddess who grants magical powers to witches, who is thus the goddess ultimately responsible for the magical powers that have

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[42] See James (1987), 107-8: "Although it is true that roses will restore Lucius to his human form, spontaneous

transformed Lucius in the first place. In fact, the only Goddess mentioned in the Golden Ass with whom Isis does not identify herself is Fortuna. But if, as according to Mithras, Lucius has been in the clutches of "blind Fortune" and is now in the tutelage of "seeing Fortune" - who is Isis - then Isis is *Fortuna* as well; this agrees still with Isis' utterance[43].

She claims herself ultimately to be *deorum dearumque facies uniformis.* If Isis tells the truth, then she is all the goddesses *and* all the gods, including Fortuna in both blind and seeing varieties. To have claimed the name of Fortuna outright in either form would have given the game away, unless of course Apuleius simply failed to understand the implications of what he was writing. Lucius is warned by a tableau containing a statue of Diana/Isis, transformed into an ass by magic courtesy of Hecate/Isis, made to suffer by Fortuna/Isis and rescued from his state by Isis in her true form, when he stops and prays to her.

ii. 2. 2. 1. two transformations

Lucius' transformation from man to ass is related in a manner that accepts multiple interpretations: it may be a simple matter of "man takes wrong magical unguent/man turns into donkey". On the other hand, the "scrupulous" reading of certain (possibly

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efforts in this direction prove to be unsuccessful... it is still that roses that break the spell, but Isis provided the favourable circumstances."

[43] James (1987), 70 n.37, suggests that while Mithras refers to Lucius' *improsperae curiositas* he does not directly condemn it. She also notes that Blind fortune and *prouidentia* are, logically, not in opposition to one another (*ibid*, 220). However, while this may be to an extent true, this cannot really be reconciled with the view of the Tale of Cupid and Psyche posited p 111 below. Venus in the Cupid and Psyche tale plays the role of both *Fortunae* - she too has a double aspect, but then, this is not surprising, since she, too, is an aspect of Isis.

unconnected) details can lead the reader to a far more complex view of Lucius' transformation.

> et illa quidem magnis suis artibus uolens reformatur. at ego nulla decantatus carmine praesentis tantum facti stupore defixus quiduis aliud magis uidebar esse quam Lucius.
>
> And so she was willingly transformed by her great arts. But as far as I was concerned, although no spell had enchanted me, I was transfixed; so held by wonder at this event that I seemed to be absolutely anything else, apart from Lucius.[44]

Although Lucius only becomes *perfectus asinus* ("a complete donkey") in *Metamorphoses* 3. 26, he is here transformed in a different way. Having just watched his hostess rub herself down with a magical unguent, change into a bird and fly away, Lucius' entire view of himself, his identity, his place in the world collapses. In a sense, Lucius has already been transformed into a donkey, or at least he is as good as a donkey. At this point, Lucius' fate has become sealed. In my opinion, it is no coincidence that Lucius' loss of definite identity precedes his transformation into a donkey. He is already there. It would not, in a manner of speaking, matter which jar of ointment Lucius rubs himself with. He would turn into a donkey anyway, so sure is his destiny.

In Metamorphoses 3. 9, there is another, earlier, hint:

> euictus tamen necessitate succumbo et ingratis licet abrepto pallio retexi corpora. dii boni, quae facies rei! quod monstrum! quae fortunarum repentina mutatio! quamquam enim iam in peculio Proserpina et Orci familia numeratus, subito in contrariam faciem obstupefactus haesi. nec possum nouae illius imaginis rationem idoneis uerbis expedire.
>
> Overcome by necessity, I gave in and, about as unwillingly as I could have done, tore away the shroud, uncovering the bodies. Good Gods, what a sight! A miracle! What an immediate reversal of my fortunes! Although I had been hitherto marked among the property of Death himself, and of Proserpina his wife, suddenly I was held, dumbfounded, in a situation of a different shape. I cannot find the right words to give a reasonable account of this new thing I saw.

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[44] *Metamorphoses* 3. 22.

Lucius, in court for murder, has already commented on how strange it is that the crowd appear to be laughing at him, when he is on trial for murder. He gives to the court a melodramatically embroidered account of the events of the preceding night - so embroidered as to be almost completely inaccurate, in fact - and is not believed[45].

A bier, surrounded by wailing mourners is brought in, and Lucius is ordered to remove the pall from it and to look upon those he has slain. He refuses to do so, but is forced, and discovers that his victims are no more than three goatskins. It transpires that they were animated by a misdirected enchantment, and that Lucius is simply the butt of a huge practical joke.

Interestingly, while the joke is on Lucius here, the whole set-up of the trial closely resembles what we know to have been the initiation rites of certain mystery cults: an initiation ceremony would often involve an ordeal which would culminate in the initiate removing a covering veil or shroud from a sacred object[46].

Lucius is transformed- "held by (or in) a different shape", as the text tells us. His reaction to the revelation of this particular mystery is rather extreme:

> fixus in lapidem steti gelidus nihil secus quam una de ceteris statuis uel columnis.
>
> I stood, transfixed, frozen into stone, no different from any of the other statues... or the columns.[47]

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[45] James (1987, pp 79-80) notes similarities between Lucius' story and those of Thelyphron and Aristomenes.
[46] See Burkert (1987), 94-6, 102-4
[47] *Metamorphoses* 3. 10.

Lucius is turned into a statue. Not that he is really a statue at this point, but the fact that metaphor is here used is, I feel, significant[48]. It is even underlined by the people of the city deciding to erect a statue to him[49].

Again, there are several ways to explain this event's place in the text. This is, of course, another picturesque, striking image, one of many within the text, and could bear no relation to anything else within the text - if the *Metamorphoses* is indeed no more than a text composed of bits and pieces of literary virtuosity glued barely together by a narrative, then this view cannot be discounted. An alternative explanation (which might agree, for example, with the reading of J. J. Winkler) could be that this and the sequence of events that precede it are no more than red herrings, ironic and self-aware hints of religion to offer the reader yet another possible interpretation of events. In Winkler's reading, in fact, the author is not only entirely aware of the varying signifieds of this passage, but actively encouraging the reader to adopt any or all of them[50]. Here, Apuleius is playing a game with us.

It is, however, entirely possible that, between the picturesquely unique and hermeneutically flexible possibilities of these interpretations, this pseudo-transformation or psychological transformation of Lucius may in fact serve a concrete purpose within the

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[48] See James (2001), 256ff; Shumate (1996), 56ff; Winkler (1985), 170-3.
[49] *Metamorphoses* 3. 11: *...et ut in aere staret imago tua decreuit.* See also Slater (1998), 38-9.
[50] "The *Golden Ass* is an evocation of a religious experience bracketed in such a way that the reader must, but cannot decide its truth." Winkler (1985), 179. See also 202-3; 227-247.

text. The most recent transformation contained within the text, and the most recent to which Lucius has been party is the stone-bound transformation of Actaeon. It foreshadows Lucius' own transformation; the punishment for Actaeon's *curiositas* is ultimately the punishment for Lucius' *curiositas* - Lucius becomes a new Actaeon shortly after the court scene. Actaeon within the *Metamorphoses* is no more than a statue; it seems fitting that Lucius should have become a statue here, because in the briefest of time spans, Lucius will become as the stone Actaeon. Again, Lucius' fate is sealed when he strips away the shroud. His metaphorical petrification and (possible) identification with Actaeon is perhaps a symbolic shorthand for the inevitable transformation that will soon occur.

Also, by becoming a statue, Lucius becomes an *object* of our observation rather than the *subject*. His identification with the Actaeon tableau causes the reader to cease identifying with Lucius and instead to look upon him; this sets Lucius up as a "moral exemplar" figure of much the same kind as any of our saints. Lucius, freed from our identification with him, becomes an example, only here an example of how *not* to approach the forbidden.

At the end of the story, this happens again. When Lucius is returned to the human race, he is again distanced from the reader, and again becomes an exemplar rather than a sharer of experiences. It is no accident that Lucius' initiation into the cult of the goddess culminates in him being dressed and displayed as a statue[51].

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[51] *Metamorphoses* 11. 24: ... exornato me et in uicem simulacri constituto. See also Slater, (1998), 38-9.

Again, we are no longer invited to identify with Lucius - rather we are to look upon him and admire him, to see him as an example to which we should aspire. At the point of Lucius' first pseudo-petrification. his relationship with the people of Hypata undergoes a subtle change. As the crowd shakes with laughter, Lucius shakes with fear.[52] As he leaves the theatre he begins to cry.

On his way home, the people don't stop laughing. The magistrates of the town come to him and tell him that he has been the centre of the town's annual celebration of Laughter (*Risus*), the "most pleasing of the gods" (*gratissimo deo*), and that he is Laughter's "author and actor" - both the creator of laughter and the star of Laughter's show. He is to enjoy the blessings of the god for the rest of his life - a blessing appropriate for the star of a comic novel. Lucius pretends to be pleased, but fails to find the joke funny. The festival of Laughter has turned out rather well for Lucius, but while he has taken previous indignities in his stride (for example, the trampling of his lunch by his well-meaning but stupid friend Pythias in 1 .25)[53], Lucius finds this situation particularly traumatic.

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[52] *maestum.. me atque etiam tunc trepidam, Metamorphoses* 3. 10.
[53] See Kenny (1974), 197-8.

Of course, the courtroom scene is a traumatic event - it is not, after all, every day that one is put on trial for murder in disturbing and abrupt circumstances - but where a normal man might feel relief ("phew... you had me going there"), Lucius is consumed with as much fear now that the trial has been exposed as a sham as he was when he thought that he was going to die[54].

While it is perfectly justifiable for Lucius to hold a grudge against the people of Hypata, his singular lack of magnanimity does not read like the result of a grudge, rather as an intense feeling of alienation against the world in which he now finds himself. The extreme symptom of this alienation is Lucius' refusal to visit his aunt Byrrhena once more.

> ad haec ego formidans et procul perhorrescens etiam ipsam domum eius.
>
> But I was terrified, at a distance, I was even afraid of that house of hers.[55]

While on his previous visits to the house, Lucius found his surroundings "charming" (*rimabundus*, *Metamorphoses* 2. 5). Now, his terror of his aunt is so extreme, he even trembles with horror at the thought of going back there.

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[54] See James (1987) 88.
[55] *Metamorphoses* 3. 12.

It is perfectly reasonable for Lucius to be scared of Byrrhena, inasmuch as, as an inhabitant of Hypata, she had a part in his humiliation. But Apuleius seems to emphasise this incident, drawing our attention to it; he represents Lucius' reply to the messenger bringing Byrrhena's invitation as if he were talking directly to his aunt[56]. It's not hard to explain the direct speech at all - but it makes this scene more graphic, more immediate, and so it should, for in rejecting Byrrhena and her house, Lucius places the final seal on his certain doom. Byrrhena's house has, at an earlier point, served to give Lucius a warning of the future; now that the warning has begun to take effect, Lucius is a spiritually-calcified image of Actaeon; again, we must conclude that his fate is sealed. As an ass, Lucius will be placed in a position of hostility with his fellow beasts; here, his metaphorical petrification has proven to be a spiritual petrification also, an emotional deadening that leads to his alienation from the human race..

At the point immediately preceding his transformation into a donkey, Lucius' position within the text is again compromised. When Lucius witnesses Pamphile transformed into a bird, his identity and his place within the human race collapse. Here, in becoming the statue, Lucius becomes the kind of man who will soon be able to transform into a beast.

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[56] This incongruity has been picked up on by a number of commentators, not least Perry (1967), 254, but in this reader's opinion, the incident makes perfect sense - in a series of events characterised by colourful metaphor, it adds a sense of immediacy to the narrative for Lucius to reply to his aunt directly; while the reader is perfectly able to work out that Lucius is simply telling the messenger what to say, the use of direct speech adds vibrancy and immediacy to the episode.

Even before his loss of identity in the witch's attic, Lucius is already as good as donkey. The only prayer he can deliver is to a jar of ointment[57]. But magic is not the way for Lucius to attain heaven. Lucius is doomed to be an ass now. His fate is in the hands of the goddess and will be whichever way he goes, for good or ill. If Lucius had apprehended the nature of the warning encoded in the statue, perhaps he could have found Isis sooner. But he didn't, and as far as the text is concerned, never could have.

ii. 2. 2. 2. in the form of a beast

Lucius' transformation into donkey is primarily physical; while a "complete ass" (*perfectus asinus*, 3. 26), he stresses to us that he still retains his human faculties (*sensum tamen retinebam humanum*, ibid.). Lucius refers to the shape as "the ass" or even as "my ass"[58] while on the other hand, Lucius' sense of identity is somehow displaced - he wants to lose "the ass" and "become Lucius" again, which, in some sense, suggests that he is no longer Lucius; in his transformation into the shape of a donkey, he somehow ceases to have a hold on the identity of Lucius.

Admittedly, at times, these distinctions waver - e.g. in 6. 26, where Lucius asks himself *quid stas, Luci?* But then, if Lucius/Ass is talking to himself, there is little else for him to call himself[59].

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[57] *Metamorphoses* 3. 24.

[58] e.g. *se rursum asino remoto prodirem in Lucium euidens exitium... offenderem*, *Metamorphoses* 3. 29. See also n. 69, below p106.

[59] Some other instances of the separation of *Lucius and* Ass appear at 11. 14 (*...nam me cum primum nefasto tegmine despoliauerat asinus...*), 3. 25 (*...nam rosis tantum demorsicatis exibis asinum statimque in meum Lucium post liminio redibis*), 9. 13 (*...nam et gratias asino meo memini...*), 7. 2 (*...ueteris fortunae et illius beati Lucii ...*), 4. 22 (*quamquam prius cum essem Lucius...*), 10. 29 (*...promicarent rosae quae me priori meo Lucio redderent*). See also Winkler (1985), 149-153.

The point remains: Lucius' identity as a donkey/identity as a human being becomes open to question[60]. He is no longer part of the human race, but nor is he really part of the animal kingdom: he cannot communicate with other animals, even those of the same species, and is greeted with hostility by virtually every animal he meets, including his own white horse[61]. He retains a human's sense of taste, much preferring human food over the roughage given to him as a beast of burden, although his appetite is that of a donkey:

> ego uero numquam alias hordeo cibatus nisi tunsum minutatim et diutina coquitatione iurulentum semper esset, rimatus angulum quo panes reliquiae totius multitudinis congestae fuerant, fauces diutina fame saucias et araneantes ualenter exerceo.
>
> But I had never eaten barley before - except when it had been finely ground and cooked for a long time so that it was porridge - so I rummaged in the corner where they had stacked the bread left over by the whole gang. My jaws were wounded and cobwebbed because of their long hunger, and I proceeded to mightily exercise them.[62]

Human tastes, asinine appetites. Lucius' sexual appetites and tastes are wholly different. While perfectly willing to mount the beautiful aristocratic lady who desires his company[63] in Book 10, Lucius finds himself lusting after other species, as well. For example, in 7. 16, it is only because Lucius is driven away by the stallion that he is unable to have his way with an attractive mare. When surveying his new form, Lucius states that his only consolation is now the size of his penis[64]. Lucius' desire for sex with other animals is frustrated: the Lucius/Ass is not, whatever the narrator might tell us, *perfectus asinus*.

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[60] See Shumate (1996), 65.
[61] e.g. *Metamorphoses* 3. 26, 7. 16.
[62] *Metamorphoses* 4. 22 (as per Hanson).
[63] *Metamorphoses* 10. 27.
[64] *nec ullum miserae reformationis uidere solacium, nisi... natura crescebat*, *Metamorphoses* 3. 26.

Lucius retains his human mind when his body is transformed into that of an animal - but is still slightly warped within by the transformation[65]. Lucius gains, in a sense, some of the attributes of a donkey's mind. And of course, the donkey was an ancient byword for stupidity and venality[66].

To a Platonist such as Apuleius, the mind and the body would have been thought of as wholly different, oppositional, forces; the reason why Lucius retains a human mind is because his mind is separate enough from his body so as not to be violated by the magic of the ointment.

The reason that Lucius' mind is infected with some bestial attributes is because it has been already poisoned. As mentioned in section 2. 2. 1. above, Lucius, by the point of his transformation, has already been spiritually transformed into an image of Actaeon.

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[65] James (1991), 155-171, makes some excellent points about the fluid, not-quite-human, not-quite-animal nature of Lucius as an ass, concentrating especially on Lucius' status as audience, perceptive yet voiceless.
[66] Winkler (1985), pp 301-5; also Mason(1999), 232-3. A glance at some sample uses of *asinus* as presented in its entry in the *OLD* (1968) vol. I, 82, gives ample evidence for "ass" and "stupid" as virtually cognate terms. See also James (1987), 92-3 and ff. James also, however, points out instances of prudery not commensurate with Lucius' state as an ass (*ibid.* 94).

ii. 2. 3. revelation

Lucius comes to himself abruptly.

> circa primam ferme noctis uigiliam experrectus pavore subito uideo praemicantis lunae candore nimio completum orbem commodum marinis emergentem fluctibus. nanctusque opacae noctis silentiosa secreta certus etiam summatem deam praecipua maiestate pollere resque prorsus humanas ipsius regi providentia... augustum specimen deae praesentis statui deprecari.
>
> At about the first watch of the night, I awoke, suddenly afraid. I saw, just rising out of the surf, the full circle of the moon, shining very brightly. Surrounded by the silent mysteries of the night's shadows, I realised that the supreme goddess now waxed greatly powerful, and that she ruled over the dealings of men with her providence... I decided to pray to the holy image of the Goddess before me.[67]

The episode of the *Metamorphoses* which culminates in the conversion of Lucius to the worship of the goddess Isis is one of the most difficult in the book, and has supplied ample evidence both to those who wish to interpret the book as a religious allegory[68], and to those who see the *Metamorphoses* as no more than a collection of unconnected tales and literary tricks with no underlying theme other than that of entertainment. The very fact that Lucius comes to himself and decides to pray creates difficulties in its own right. Previous attempts to declaim on Lucius' part have been abortive[69], and we have every right to be surprised that Lucius' prayer is fluent, eloquent, and lengthy.

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[67] *Metamorphoses* 11. 1. See Laird (1997), 70-2.

[68] See n. 3, above.

[69] See *Metamorphoses* 3. 25: *iam humano gestu simul et uoce priuatus;* 3. 29: *et 'O' quidem tantum disertum ac ualidum clamitaui, reliquum autem Caesaris nomen enuntiore non potui;* 7. 3: *et uerbum quidem praecedens... clamaui, sequens uero nullo pacto disserere potui;* 8. 29: *porro quirites perclamare gestiui sed uiduatum ceteris syllabis et litteris processit 'O' tantum.* See also James (1991), 159-60.

The possibility that Lucius/Donkey is praying silently - 'in his head' - is unlikely. In the classical world, prayer was invariably spoken aloud, unless it was of shameful content or of dubious morality (for example, a curse or an invocation of a god whilst performing an act of black magic)[70]. And yet, far from being some muttered invocation, Lucius' prayer leads him to the reassumption of his human form - and to happiness, of a kind.

Despite this prayer's strange, unsettling context, it is clearly delivered in the right place at the right time. If Isis is the agent of all of Lucius' troubles, the goddess who warns and punishes, tortures and rescues at the time she has set, then it seems fair to assume that this should be the time she should ordain for Lucius' revelation. This is the first time in the entire novel that Lucius/Donkey has successfully escaped from captivity[71], the first time that he is truly free. With his freedom, Lucius has no place to go, and prays freely. Lucius is no longer restricted to listening, eating, lusting, making erroneous judgements; the physical shackles of his captivity are not the only shackles to be loosed.

The prayer seems to have been delivered at the right time, in the right spirit; and the prayer is answered.

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[70] See n. 1, p 18.
[71] *Metamorphoses* 4. 5-6; 6. 27-30; (arguably) 9. 1-3, illustrating some failed attempts to get away.

Lucius himself, whether human or donkey, only actually prays three times in the entire *Metamorphoses.*[72] The other two occasions both occur in book 3; the first being during the sham murder trial in *Metamorphoses* 3. 7, where Lucius prays for mercy, after having given a completely fabricated account of the previous night's events. The reader knows this; the joke on Lucius is that the crowd are aware of it too. The prayer is empty, and is unheard, since Lucius becomes the butt of Laughter's joke. The second is directed to the pot of magic ointment in *Metamorphoses* 3. 24 - again, things fail to turn out to Lucius' advantage.

Interestingly, all three prayers coincide with the transformations of Lucius: the first, the transformation of attitude that makes him a stranger to his kind[73]; the second, the loss of identity and transformation into a beast. And the third, of course, brings about the appearance of Isis and his transformation from ass to man.

When Lucius' revelation of Isis, brought about by the third prayer, is over, the goddess vanishes and Lucius wakes up. The most obvious explanation of his regained ability to talk is that it was all a dream; certainly he does not continue to talk once the vision is over. However, Apuleius' habit is to flag incidents such as this.

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[72] That is, performs an action using the verb *precor* or one of its compounds.
[73] pp 99ff. above.

More than once, the author imagines the *lector scrupulosus* asking him, "How do you know that?", and is answered[74]. But here, the prayer and revelation is left undeclared. Nowhere does the author write, "I realised that I had been able to speak because I had been dreaming", even when it is clearly the case. As a result, the shock factor of the event, its unsettling nature, is undiminished, in the same way as is the incident with Byrrhena's messenger in 3. 12[75]. Like the incident with the messenger, this scene seems to have been deliberately placed to throw the reader off-balance, signifying a change in the pace of the text. Both scenes are surprises to the reader.

These momentary fractures in the reality of the text are quite common in the *Metamorphoses*. The Oracle's utterance at the beginning of the story of Cupid and Psyche has already been noted; it serves to remind the reader that the story that is beginning may be more than a simple *fabula anilis*. Yet another example of this kind of narrative dysfunction is the way that the story of Thelyphron is told (2. 20-31).

Thelyphron's story is one of the most disturbing and puzzling in the book. When Thelyphron begins to tell his story, what has actually happened to his face is left unsaid except in the vaguest of terms - this would, of course, give away the end of the story; in fact, the reaction of those who already know Thelyphron's story suggests that its ending will be hilarious rather than horrific.

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[74] *Metamorphoses* 9. 15; 9. 30. See Smith (1999), 202-5.
[75] See p. 100 above

This effect is accentuated by Thelyphron's own cod-rhetorical posture as he begins the story proper in 2. 21. But from start to finish, the story seems wrong. Thelyphron, we discover, is telling his story with no nose and no ears, these having been stolen from him by witches by mistake; they intended to steal the ears and nose of a corpse, who, as we only discover right at the end of the story, has the same name as the narrator[76]. To quote J.J. Winkler:

> What kind of narrator can efface the end of the tale that literally marked him for life, so that he not only recounts events as they seemed to him before the awful revelation but in no way avoids the almost unbearable irony of that time between his mutilation and its discovery?[77]

The tale of Thelyphron is full of secrets: the cause of his mutilation; the name of the corpse; the true nature of the "grieving" widow. Thelyphron's own fate is governed by his stupidity; he is a buffoon with the amazing ability to say the wrong thing ("if you ever need me to do this again, don't hesitate to call me"[78]). And yet, his story is full of information that is hidden from us - Thelyphron in the story is nowhere near as artful as Thelyphron telling the story. In the same way that the tale of Cupid and Psyche is not really a tale which could told by a grizzled old woman, the story of the graveyard-watchman is not really a tale which could be told by a buffoon[79].

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[76] *Metamorphoses* 2. 30: *eodem mecum uocabulo nuncupabatur.*
[77] Winkler (1985), 112; See also Kenny (1974), 203, 205; Tatum (1999), 162-5; S. Harrison (1998) 68-70.
[78] *immo inquam domina de famulis tuis unum putato et quotiens operam nostram desiderabis fidenter impera, Metamorphoses* 2. 26.
[79] See also Winkler (1985), 110-115.

It is, I feel, significant that at the end of Thelyphron's narrative the truth is wholly revealed by Zatchlas, "one of the foremost Egyptian prophets"[80], a young man in robes, with a completely shaved head, a vision not unlike Lucius the acolyte at the end of Book 11. In the same way that all is revealed and laid open at the end of Thelyphron's story by a young man in the garb of an Egyptian priest, so too the primary narrative of the *Metamorphoses is* brought to an end by the actions of a young man in robes with a shaved head[81].

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[80] *Zatchlas adest Aegyptius propheta primarius. Metamorphoses* 2. 27,

[81] Smith (1999), 209-10. James (1987), 88-9, however, does not consider Thelyphron's story to be instructive, considering it, along with Aristomenes' story, as part of a build-up to Lucius' humiliation at the Festival of Laughter. This, I feel, fails to address the role of the Egyptian prophet in the story, and its telling in Byrrhena's house.

ii. 3. perilous places

The middle section of the *Metamorphoses* is taken up with the story of Cupid and Psyche. This long, ornate and magical tale is told to the girl Charite by an old woman in the employ of Charite's kidnappers in the robbers' cave, simply in order to shut the prisoner up[82]. Lucius, by this point a donkey, and counted part of the bandits' booty, overhears.

Again, the reader gets the strange feeling that the author is playing tricks on his/her expectations. The story is told in Apuleius' finest rhetorical style, rather than in the rustic dialect of the hag who cooks for the robbers. The story continually takes us by surprise, while not taking itself at all seriously. For example, Psyche's father visits an oracle: as mentioned above[83], the god Apollo is presented as replying "in Latin for the benefit of the author of the Milesian story". Venus offers a bounty on Psyche, the reward being "seven sweet kisses from Venus herself, plus an extra kiss, long and honey-sweet with a thrusting tongue"[84].

Parts of the story of Cupid and Psyche echo Lucius' own story very closely.

> nam summa laquearia citro et ebore curiose cauata subeunt aureae columnae parietes omnes argenteo caelamine conteguntur bestiis et id genus pecudibus occurentibus ob os introeuntium enimuero pauimenta ipsa lapide pretioso caesim deminuto in varia picturae genera discriminantur...

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[82] *Metamorphoses* 4. 27.
[83] p 91 above.
[84] *ab ipsa uenere septem sauia suauia et unum blandientis adpulsu linguae longe mellitum. Metamorphoses* 6. 8.

> For the vaulting of the ceiling was crafted in citron and intricately carved ivory. Gold columns held it up. All of the walls were completely covered in silver, embossed with wild beasts and other domestic animals of that sort running up to greet one entering... The very floor was covered in precious stones, formed into mosaics and divided up into pictures of different kinds.[85]

Thus the description of Cupid's palace begins. It continues in much the same vein, finally concluding with this statement:

> nec est quicquam quod ibi non est
>
> There is nothing that exists which is not there.[86]

While on the one hand, this house's design is the stuff of fantasy, its reality is still affirmed (and, in fact, emphasised). You will recall that Byrrhena's house is described in *Metamorphoses* 2. 19 in an almost entirely opposite manner (*quidquid fieri non potest, ibi est* /whatever cannot exist, there it is). This house is almost a polar opposite of Byrrhena's. Both Byrrhena's home and Cupid's house partake of unreality by virtue of their excessive reality. The servants in the house of Cupid are invisible, no more than disembodied voices[87]; despite this, they are quite thoroughly described. On the other hand, Byrrhena's servants are hardly described at all, this lack of description imbuing them with a nebulous quality. The terms in which they are described causes these faceless figures to, in a way, share their home's quality of unreality[88].

Cupid's house is presented as being unreal in that it contains a surfeit of real objects, Byrrhena's because it contains an excess of objects which are *too* real. Both amount to the

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[85] *Metamorphoses* 5. 1.
[86] *Metamorphoses* 5. 2.
[87] *Metamorphoses* 5. 2-3.
[88] *Metamorphoses* 2. 19.

same thing: magical or divine 'dream-areas', in which the normal rules of what should be found in a house are suspended, and where the world of divinity breaks through in order to warn the one who enters of what is to come, a warning which, as we have seen, is destined to be ignored. Byrrhena offers Lucius a cryptic and perhaps unintentional warning of the things which are to befall him, even while he takes delight in the aesthetic beauty of her house. Psyche, enchanted with her new home, is openly warned by her husband that if she breaks the rules, she will lose her home and husband[89]. Both Lucius and Psyche forget these warnings.

Both characters eventually fall from grace. Like Lucius, Psyche also experiences a transformation of attitude which precedes her fall. Psyche has agreed never to reveal the nature of her marriage to anyone, but, when visited by her two jealous sisters, fails to offer a consistent story and is tempted by them to betray her pledge entirely. Despite the evidence of her own senses, Psyche falls prey to her sisters' lies and believes that she is in fact not married to a handsome and loving god, but instead to a beast, a massive serpent[90]. Psyche has slept with her husband. She has touched him, she has smelled him and she has heard his voice, and Psyche is well aware that her husband is of great beauty and is good in bed[91] and yet, suddenly, maybe because of some connection to the original oracle of *Metamorphoses* 4. 33, Psyche fails under the illusion that she is married to a monster. Her fall is a result of this change of mind.

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[89] *Metamorphoses* 5. 5-6.
[90] *Metamorphoses* 5. 18-21.
[91] *nec ipsi cupidini comparo* ('I wouldn't compare Cupid himself with you'), *Metamorphoses* 5. 6.

There is a point in most allegorical stories where either the allegory must lose out to the plot, or, more commonly, the logic of the plot must fall prey to the allegory[92]. It is at such points that allegories are wont to reveal themselves for what they are, and the story of Cupid and Psyche is here no exception. While it is wholly illogical for Psyche to disregard everything she knows about her husband and to try and murder him, it fits perfectly into the Platonic allegory of a soul's sin and redemption.

Psyche resolves to kill her husband, sees him for the first time in the light of an oil lamp, and is transfixed, struck dumb. Although she forgets her resolve for murder, she is undone by a circumstance out of her control: the lamp drops a little oil on Cupid's shoulder, he is awakened by the pain, and he flies away, leaving Psyche, despite her best efforts to keep hold of him, far behind[93].

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[92] For example, in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 168, Christian and Hopeful find themselves locked in the castle of Giant Despair for the best part of a week, until Christian suddenly remembers he was all along in possesion of a key called 'Promise', which effects Christian and Hopeful's swift escape from Doubting Castle.

[93] *Metamorphoses* 5. 22-24.

The story of Cupid and Psyche serves as a tableau of the plot in miniature[94]. It distils the religious instruction placed within the rest of the work into a small form. Of course, Psyche/ψύχη is not only the Greek word for spirit, but the technical term used by Platonic philosophers to refer to the human soul, which was generally thought of as "descending" from an exalted state in order to take up residence in the human body. Most Platonic philosophers in Apuleius' day believed that the incarnation of the psyche into the human body by descent into the material was an evil (since while the spiritual realm was wholly good, the material realm was wholly evil); however, various schools of thought disagreed as to whether this descent was due to some outside evil propelling the soul downwards, or due to some error or sin *(hamartia/*ἁμαρτία). The school of thought to which Apuleius is generally agreed to have belonged taught that the soul descended through "the erring judgement of free will"[95].

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[94] For *cupido* as a motif in the *Metamorphoses*, see James (1998), 113-121. For the idea of *Psyche/*ψύχη as represented in antiquity, see Maaskant-Kleibrink (1990), 13-14, 23-28. On the relationship of Charite to Psyche, see Dowden (1993), 99-105; Too (2001), 184-7, offers some fascinating thoughts concerning the relationship of the Cupid and Psyche narrative to issues of identity raised in *Metamorphoses* 1. 1.

[95] Albinus, quoted Dillon (1977), 293.

It is quite easy to see how the story of Psyche, despite its trappings of folk tale and romance[96], conforms to this. Psyche (literally) falls from her exalted state[97] and suffers in order to regain it, eventually descending to Hell and falling into a dreamlike sleep[98] (representative of death), from which she is finally rescued by her immortal lover (representing the ascent of the soul of the philosopher after death). Psyche struggles with two kinds of love: Bad Love (represented by Venus) and Good Love (represented by Cupid). Bad Love repeatedly attempts to drag Psyche down to a lower level (and so, Bad Love is love of the worldly and the bodily: greed, gluttony, bad sex), while Psyche, as befits the ψύχη of a philosopher, strives throughout to find a way to be reunited with her blessed estate as the wife of Good Love (which we can equate with the love of higher things, the love of wisdom and goodness).

Psyche's story is, therefore, a short retelling both of the story of Lucius and of the Platonic myth of the soul, and is quite clearly connected to the Platonic myth, with its characters and images seemingly straight out of a textbook of Middle Platonic doctrine. Now, if this is the case, then we could argue quite convincingly that Lucius' tale is also a Platonic myth in its own right. It is quite reasonable to conclude that the more obvious Platonic myth of Psyche/ψύχη gives us a another key towards our understanding of the *Metamorphoses* in the light of the Platonic idea of the descent and redemption of the philosopher's soul. Of course, with any allegory, no matter how obvious, the analogy is not perfect. But

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[96] On why the story of Cupid and Psyche is *not* a folk story, see Schlam (1993), pp 65-72. On why it is, see Wright (1971).
[97] *Metamorphoses* 5. 24.

nevertheless, the analogy exists. Through the presentation of an obviously Platonic story-within-a-story which parallels the main story in many important ways, Apuleius offers us, in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, an interpretation of the less obvious main story.

ii. 4. fractures

So much for the religious aspects of the *Metamorphoses*. We now come to look at their presentation, at how the conversion of Lucius affects the reader.

The *Metamorphoses* is a narrative of religious conversion, in that it shows to the reader a religious conversion, and, as we shall see, attempts to impose upon the reader the surprise and shock of a religious conversion. But, on the other hand, its purpose in doing so is made less clear by the fluid status of the narrator.

We have noted that on a number of occasions, the events of the *Metamorphoses* do not necessarily make as much sense as we would necessarily expect them to. Aristomenes and Thelyphron are witness to this, both of them victim of forces outside of their control or experience. Pythias is a symptom of this dysfunction, his actions in 1. 25 no more than a joke played on Lucius by the vagaries of the plot.

The world in which Lucius finds himself does not follow the rules the reader expects the world of the novel to follow. But then, should a world where people are transformed into

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[98] *Metamorphoses* 6. 21.

birds and donkeys necessarily follow any rules at all? The world Apuleius has created in the *Metamorphoses* follows no rules apart from its own. And yet, paradoxically, the sense of "wrongness" in the plot actually parallels the real world, where events are not necessarily neatly plotted. In the real world, things do not necessarily have to follow an obvious logical pattern, whatever those of a more determinist persuasion might believe.

The apparent dysfunctions of logic and order in Lucius' surroundings are further complicated by the fact that more often than not, Apuleius does not let his inconsistencies pass by. He even draws the reader's attention to them. The reader, faced with the plot, is shocked out of the "willing suspension of disbelief" and into an uncomfortable relationship with the text. Why should this be? It has been suggested above[99] that this is a deliberate strategy on the part of Apuleius in order that the reader experience some of the feelings, if not the actual experiences themselves, of Lucius. This is by no means a new theory. Brendan Kenny:

> The reader is confused and disturbed and moves uneasily between hysterical laughter and fear, but this is not merely... a bad joke. It can be read as a deliberate strategy on the part of Apuleius, to ensure that his audience should share his hero's alienation and uncertainty about the real nature of the world , and in particular of the human beings that inhabit it.[100]

Kenny quite rightly draws the conclusion from an examination of a number of illogical and seemingly inconsistent points within the text that the design of Apuleius is to cause the reader to experience the same sense of alienation and distress that Lucius himself

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[99] See pp 79-80 above.
[100] Kenny (1974), 196.

experiences. Winkler includes this theory in his list of possible explanations for Lucius' conversion as

> ...the one theory of real merit, which is that the surprise of book 11 is designed not to be a statement of faith for the reader to accept, but an experience that reproduces the original surprise and wonder of a religious revelation... [101]

Winkler fails fully to address this theory, claiming that this and the other theories with which he groups it

> ...are at least in the right ballpark, but that in rooting for one team against another they mistake the nature of the game. For they all seem to slip into the trap of endorsing the ambiguous calls to accept higher authority... thus favouring the sublime over the ridiculous, instead of savouring the well-contrived balance of indeterminacy and the author's careful reticence.[102]

Winkler has a point, although his assertion that the novel is deliberately constructed in order to supply multiple interpretations is perhaps, ironically, missing the point[103].

Nancy Shumate's *Crisis and Conversion,* as mentioned in the first part of this thesis, contains a working definition of what makes a conversion, and then proceeds to show how the *Metamorphoses* conform to it. The four stages of conversion are, as stated above *crisis, incubation, conversion, and consolidation*[104]. Shumate, rightly, I feel, identifies the tenuous or "liquescent" qualities of Lucius' world as signifiers of Lucius' pre-conversion crisis and incubation:

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[101] Winkler (1985), 243-4, citing Kenny as the proponent of this reading, although Kenny does not himself explicitly state this theory.
[102] *ibid*, 245.
[103] See van der Paardt (1988), pp 110-11.
[104] See pp 24-5 above.

> Thus it is not simply a case of a man becoming an animal. Lucius is stuck somewhere between the two; he does not belong unambiguously in one category or the other. In view of his predicament, the categories themselves seem quite inadequate. Instead of seeming mutually exclusive, the two identities shade into one another on a continuum, and Lucius is suspended somewhere in the overlapping space.[105]

Shumate and Kenny's theses are complementary (while, on the other hand, Winkler's view, which attempts to be all-inclusive, excludes them)[106]. Kenny deals with the discontinuities of the novel and shows how they can be read as a deliberate move to make the reader a player in the action of the novel, while Shumate shows us their direction.

These things taken into account, it becomes necessary to re-examine certain incidents in the *Metamorphoses* with regard to their effect not only on the narrator, but also on the reader. If we return, for example, to the Actaeon/Diana tableau in *Metamorphoses* 2. 5, a further complexity is added to what is already a highly complex scene. Actaeon's fate, as we have established, is presented to Lucius as a self-fulfilling warning/prophecy in the same vein as that given to Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel* 4: 10-17. Lucius becomes both Actaeon and statue spiritually and metaphorically at *Metamorphoses* 3. 9- 10, and 3. 22, an object for the reader to view as an example rather than a person with whom to identify.

The tableau forms a break with reality: caryatid columns cannot tiptoe lightly on rolling spheres, stone dogs cannot leap forward, stone fruit cannot hang from the branches of

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[105] Shumate (1996), 65.

[106] However, Shumate argues that her thesis is not incompatible with Winkler's, but then goes on to describe how the *Metamorphoses* is a narrative of religious conversion (1996), 13ff. This is already explicitly excluded by Winkler (1985), 245-7. S. Harrison (1997) also points out the fundamental irreconcilability of the two views, but goes on to suggest that Lucius' religious experience is in fact parodic of other religious narratives, with particular reference to Aelius Aristides, a view he sets out in more detail in *id.* (2000).

stone trees without breaking under their own weight. The reader is drawn in to the beautifully phrased ekphrasis of the scene, while at the same time distanced by its unreality. A tension is created, a crisis of understanding within the reader.

This epistemological crisis is, of course, of a different nature to the spiritual/epistemological crisis experienced by Lucius. His crisis is an all-encompassing one, a crisis of existence - as signified by his transformations, both spiritual and physical. On the other hand, the crisis of understanding as experienced by the reader is much more limited, confined as it is to our understanding of the fictional world inhabited by Lucius, as signified by the text. But the reader's epistemological crisis serves this purpose: by forcing the reader momentarily to disengage from identification with Lucius, the text enables the reader to look upon Lucius' situation as an outsider, creating a moment where Lucius becomes the moral exemplar figure. In the same way, when Lucius is displayed as a statue in 11. 24, the reader is invited not so much to identify with him as to gaze upon him.

Again, if we examine the incident with the messenger at 3. 12, we find that it has a sense of "wrongness" - the reader feels that something about the way Lucius feels and reacts is somehow wrong in the context of his world, and more so in the context of the reader's own constructed world view. People tend to view the world in which they live as ordered, whether it happens to be or not, and tend to expect fictional worlds - even fantastic ones - to make an internal sense. In the representation of an event which causes the reader to feel discomfort with the fictional world, the author causes the reader to begin to undergo a

crisis identical in duration (i.e. the length of the rest of the story) and identical in magnitude (and completely different in magnitude at the same time[107])

The fracture in the fabric of reality of the whole sequence in *Metamorphoses* 3. 9 through to 3. 12 is played upon by Apuleius, to the extent that it cannot be avoided or ignored by the *lector scrupulosus,* Apuleius' ideal reader. In fact, each of the incidents mentioned in Part 1 above creates and sustains this feeling of dysfunction and (detached) crisis/incubation in the reader. The same effect is achieved by the end of the four tales of adultery in 9. 14-31. After some comical stories, the fourth ends with murder, made more bizarre by the appearance of not one, but two ghosts. In the middle of the most unreal section of this last story, Lucius/donkey suddenly turns directly to the reader and asks:

> sed forsitan lector scrupulosus reprehendens narratum meum sic argumentaberis unde autem tu astutule asine intra terminos pistrini contentus quid secreto ut affirmas mulieres gesserint scire potuisti?
>
> But as a thorough reader, you might pick holes in my narrative, arguing thus: 'how come you were able to find out what the women brought about in secret when you were shut up within the mill, you clever little ass?[108]

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[107] Identical in magnitude, because the crisis that imperils Lucius imperils his whole existence, which is *wholly contained* within the text of the story; completely different in magnitude, because the crisis of the reader is also wholly contained within the text and its context, and thus bears no representational force, while on the other hand, Lucius' crisis represents the endangerment of a complete human existence.

[108] *Metamorphoses* 9. 30 (as Hanson).

Suddenly, in the middle of all this talk about ghosts, Apuleius makes a concession to verisimilitude. This jars the reader out of his/her acceptance of the text, enhances the reader's sense of alienation, thus continuing the incubation experience[109]. The way stories are presented in the text also accentuates this sense of alienation: repeatedly Lucius the narrator introduces unpleasant stories as "delightful"[110], while a story presented as a "tragedy" ends happily[111]. Again, Shumate's idea of "incubation", of a sense of utter alienation, is perpetuated by the deliberate foiling of the reader's expectations.

This continual surprise of the reader is brought to a head by the sudden and unexpected prayer of Lucius, followed by the miraculous appearance of Isis, made even more uncanny (as mentioned above) by the manner of the prayer, spoken aloud by a hitherto mute donkey, combined with the fact that Lucius/donkey is praying at all.

It should be noted that nearly all of the narrative "inconsistencies" that exist in the plot of the *Metamorphoses* (all but one, in fact) can be explained quite easily and logically within the context of the narrative. However, when the reader needs to think about these things, even for a moment or two, it does create a pause in the plot, a kind of jolt from which the reader needs to recover in order to be immersed fully into the narrative once more.

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[109] James (1987), 46f, makes the observation that often, the reader is expected to quibble more over the relatively mundane mechanics of knowing a story than over the fantastic nature of the stories themselves. This again creates a sense of disconnection between the world of Lucius and the reader.
[110] For example, in *Metamorphoses* 9. 14.
[111] *Metamorphoses* 10. 2-12.

The sense of dysfunction created by these incidents within the text does not, as we would expect, end with Lucius' conversion. The events of Book 11 do not really any longer conform to the pattern we have so far described, since, while the various narrative dysfunctions, contradictions and surprises continue for the reader, Lucius himself is no longer affected - he, at least, is now in harmony with his world.

> en ecce! pristinis aerumnis absolutus Isidis magnae providentia gaudiens Lucius de sua fortuna triumphat!
>
> Behold! Absolved from his old sufferings, and rejoicing in the providence of Great Isis, Lucius rejoices and triumphs over his Fortune![112]

Lucius, who has spent the book trying to communicate, when transformed back into a human being finds himself without anything to say. He turns to the priest who has witnessed his transformation, Mithras, who looks upon Lucius with an expression described as "kindly and... more than human,"[113] and addresses Lucius in the manner of a prophet. His utterance: that Lucius has been a slave of Fortune, that travelling on "the slippery road of a misspent youth" he "fell into servile pleasures" and "carried back the perverse prize of unfruitful curiosity"[114].

The implication is that, ultimately, Lucius' sufferings have been all his own fault, the result of a free choice on Lucius' part. Mithras goes on to tell Lucius that now he is a man once again, he has been rescued from the dominion of blind Fortune and placed into the hands of a different kind of Fortune.

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[112]*Metamorphoses* 11. 15.
[113]*Metamorphoses* 11. 14: *quo facto sacerdos uultu geniali et hercules inhumano in aspectum meum attonitus sic effatur.*
[114]*Metamorphoses* 11. 15: *sed lubrico uirentis aetatulae ad seruiles delapsus uoluptates, curiositatis improsperae sinistrum praemium reportasti.*

> in tutelam iam receptus es fortunae sed uidentis, quae suae lucis splendore ceteros etiam deos illuminat.
>
> You have been received into the care of Fortune, but a Fortune who can see, who with the glory of her own radiance gives fight to all the other gods.[115]

He exhorts Lucius to join the Isiac cult. Then he collapses, exhausted in the manner of an oracle who has completed his task[116]. Isis has already told Lucius that she has told the story to Mithras in a dream. The story is retold to us and interpreted by someone with, it is reasonable to assume, an understanding of the story as held by a reader who has (perhaps only) read *Metamorphoses* 11.1-15. Mithras' interpretation of events hinges on an interpretation of the words of Isis, an interpretation which concludes that Lucius, saved from sin by Isis, can only be safe from the assaults of fate while under the protection of Isis, and should consequently stay a member of Isis' cult.

Isis has, however, *not* saved Lucius from the state of being a donkey. This, it is averred, is a state which has resulted because of his real problem, his *sacrilega curiositas* (literally, "sacrilegious curiosity"). The explanation of the story as put forward by Mithras the priest is plausible; it follows some of the more obvious themes of the plot (curiosity, fortune, sin and punishment), and has the apparatus of being authoritative, presented as it is in the manner of an oracular utterance.

Lucius himself accepts Mithras' interpretation of the events as read. However, Mithras too inherits some of the symptoms of Apuleius' peculiar and deliberate narrative dysfunction.

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[115] *Metamorphoses* 11. 15.
[116] *Metamorphoses* 11. 16.

While the priest is certainly the priest mentioned by Isis herself in *Metamorphoses* 11. 6, when his name is introduced the informed reader should perform a minor double take.

> To give the name Mithras to the high priest of Isis, whose role is to reveal to the first-reader a startling new meaning for the *Golden Ass*, is like introducing the pope in the last chapter of a detective novel and calling him Martin Luther.[117]

Winkler exaggerates here. While Mithras' naming affects all of his previous utterances and his part in Lucius' initiation, it does not necessarily follow that Apuleius introduced Mithras into the text in order to signal to the reader that something is *wrong*[118] - It is significant that the priest is not given his name until a significant amount of time after his interpretation of Lucius' story has been heard and accepted[119] - but not inasmuch as Lucius has been fooled into accepting a contradictory religion; rather it should alert us to the more general or symbolic nature of Lucius' conversion. We have seen how the Platonic myth of the ψύχη, which, as presented in the story of Cupid and Psyche, parallels Lucius' own story. Lucius, however, unlike Psyche, has certainly not striven to attain a higher state, no matter what the uninformed man in the crowd might have thought:

> Hunc omnipotentis hodie deae numen augustum reformauit ad homines. Felix et ter beatus hercules qui uitae scilicet praecedentis innocentia fideque meruerit tam praeclarum de caelo patrocinium ut renatus quodam modo statim sacrorum obsequio desponderetur.
>
> This is the one who today was remade into a man by the glorious power of the omnipotent goddess. Blimey, he's lucky, and three times blessed! Obviously, it's because of the blamelessness and faith of his former life, that he was reborn, as it were, and at once joined to the service of her cult.[120]

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[117] Winkler (1985), 245.
[118] That unusually named people exist in real life is, of course, indisputable; this writer, for example, has himself been privileged to know an Evangelical Christian named Mohammed. However, fictional worlds tend to follow more logic than the real world. While in the real world, we can dismiss such incidents as being coincidental and of no importance, in the criticism of fiction we have no such luxury.
[119] The priest is not named until 11. 22.
[120] *Metamorphoses* 11. 16.

But this, perhaps, is beside the point. Lucius, like Psyche, is rescued; his entire path has been due to the providence of the goddess (and Isis, who represents the Good Love that rescues Psyche, also claims for herself the identity of Venus, the Bad Love that causes her to suffer).

Even if Lucius has not striven for the good before, he certainly does now. In his initiation into the worship of Isis, Lucius does become alienated from the rest of the world. A narrator who could possibly have been the most vocal hair fetishist of the ancient world[121] willingly shaves his head[122]. Winkler suggests this transformation echoes the bald head traditionally sported by the grotesque, the clown or the mime[123]. Lucius sells everything he has - even his clothing, in order to pay for increasingly involved and expensive initiations endorsed by visions of the gods themselves[124]. Lucius himself becomes the kind of person who accosts people on street corners and regales them with his life story. But then, Lucius' hair fetish was somewhat symbolic of his sexual desire (which, in the eyes of a Platonist wholly dedicated to the spirit as opposed to the body, would have been evil). And why should Lucius, no longer concerned with the material, not feel perfectly comfortable with getting rid of all his possessions?

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[121] *Metamorphoses* 2. 8-10.
[122] *Metamorphoses* 11. 28, 30.
[123] Winkler (1985), p287ff. However, van Mal-Maeder (1997), 101, suggests that the shaven head is in fact emblematic of servitude rather than comedy.
[124] See van Mal-Maeder (1997), 102-4.

Throughout the *Metamorphoses*, or at least since the introduction of the Actaeon tableau in Book 2, Lucius' identity has been fluid (as described in section 2. 3. 2, above). It would be perfectly reasonable to expect that with his conversion, Lucius' sense of his own identity would stabilise, and indeed his own view of his identity, as expressed in the text, suggests that he has indeed achieved a sense of personal stability. However, while Lucius perceives that the flux of his identity has achieved an equilibrium, it seems to the reader that the sense of who Lucius actually is loses all coherence[125]. For a religiously oriented interpretation of the text, this is inconvenient. The well-documented slip in *Metamorphoses* 11.27, where Lucius, introduced as a Greek in 1. 1, suddenly becomes a "man from Madaura" (*Madaurensis*) only adds to the sense of discontinuity in the text[126]. But then, Lucius has never been a real person; he is only a character in a novel. Lucius' conversion is not a real conversion. The new identity of the author reveals him as the philosopher, the symbol behind the story. The conversion of Lucius is a symbol of something else - the transformation of man through the medium of philosophy to the understanding of the Good. That his chosen goddess claims to be the root all goddesses and all religions can only strengthen this point. Lucius' conversion, while presented as a conversion to the worship of Isis, in fact appears to represent a more general conversion, a connection to the much more general Platonic conception of God as the supreme intellectual principle.

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[125] And thus also the author. See Too (2001), 181-2.
[126] See van der Paardt (1999), 237-246.

One of Apuleius' additions to Middle Platonic philosophy was the doctrine of the three *prouidentiae*, described in *De Platone et eius Dogmate*[127]. The highest *prouidentia*, the will of God, or λόγος orders everything, and contains Fate. The second *prouidentia*, contained alongside Fate within the highest *prouidentia* is embodied by the Gods, who control things within the material realm. The third *prouidentia* is embodied within Fate. Entirely separate from the three *prouidentiae* are luck and chance[128]. Apuleius describes gods in *De Deo Socratis* as *daemones*, holders of the second *prouidentia*, and explicitly not the Good themselves[129]. Although Isis was important in Apuleius' cosmology, it would not have been in Apuleius' interest as a Platonic philosopher to suggest her as the only way. However, in the *Metamorphoses*, Isis is described as a syncretistic mesh of all goddesses. Since goddesses fall under the remit of the second *prouidentia* (and *prouidentia* is a characteristic which, as we have seen, is ascribed to Isis in the *Metamorphoses*), Isis can either be argued to represent a sort of half-way to enlightenment, a pointer to the Good, or as a symbol representing the Good itself, in which case Apuleius is not so much advocating the henotheistic worship of Isis as the seeking of a religious experience - *any* religious experience - for the purposes of enlightenment and the seeking of the Good. For our purposes, it is immaterial. Whatever Apuleius meant to signify by the final revelation of Isis, he has given us a powerful and affecting conversion story, powerfully told, which, in its nature, forces us to undergo a conversion into the mysteries of the plot.

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[127] Dillon (1977), 309-10, argues persuasively that the attribution of *De Platone et eius Dogmate* to Apuleius is correct.
[128] *ibid.* 323ff.
[129] *ibid.* 317-20.

ii. 5. brief conclusions

It is fair to say that the *Metamorphoses* can be read as a quite serious (and evangelical) conversion narrative with a few mistakes, or as a mish-mash of stories and ideas with no attempt at internal consistency, or as any and all of the above. This particular reading of the text has presupposed that the *Metamorphoses* is a valid narrative of conversion (as per Shumate) and that the *Metamorphoses* is a consistent and crafted text, thus attempting to draw meaning from a holistic reading of the text. In some respects, of course, it doesn't really matter whether the text is inconsistent or not, since as a text it now has a separate and independent life and could therefore be interpreted outside any context at all.

The conclusion that must be drawn from this reading of the text is that while the *Metamorphoses* still qualifies as a narrative of conversion, it is not written in order to encourage the reader to convert to Isis, but rather to see the text as an allegorical view of the descent and salvation of the soul; it brings the reader through the entire text on the back of the donkey, as it were, culminating in a surprise and sense of being thrown off balance roughly analogous to a religious conversion.

The position of Isis in the text, the identity of the priest, the position of the narrative of Cupid and Psyche, and the shifting of Lucius' identity lead the reader to accept the narrative as a Platonic myth, while at the same time descending with the soul of the narrator through his various nonsensical and comedic sufferings, ultimately to be redeemed and surprised at the end along with Lucius.

iii. sadly borne

iii. 1. show and tell: the *confessions* of augustine

> da mihi domine scire et intellegere utrum sit prius invocare te an laudare te et scire te prius sit an invocare te. sed quis te inuocat nesciens te? aliud enim pro alio potest inuocare nesciens. an potius inuocaris ut sciaris? quomodo autem inuocabunt in quem non crediderunt? aut quomodo credunt sine praedicante? et laudabunt dominum qui requirunt eum. quaerentes enim inueniunt eum et inuenientes laudabunt eum. quaeram te domine inuocans te et inuocem te credens in te praedicatus enim es nobis. inuocat te domine fides mea quam dedisti mihi quam inspirasti mihi per humanitatem fiiii tui, per ministerium praedicatoris tui.
>
> Grant to me, Lord, to know and to understand, which of these comes first: to know you or to worship you? Does knowing you come before calling you? Or can one call on you without knowing you? But who calls on you without knowing you? For someone who doesn't know could call on something else instead. But can't you be called upon so that you might be known? But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without someone preaching? And they who seek the Lord will praise him. In seeking, they find him, and finding him they will praise him. I would seek you, Lord, calling on you - and I would call on you believing in you. For you have been preached to us. My faith, which you gave to me, which you breathed into me through the humanity of your Son, and through the ministry of your preachers, calls on you, Lord.[1]

The *Confessions* of Augustine begin more or less *in medias res*[2], with no reference to the reader, no mention of a title, no argument for the book. Instead, the saint speaks directly to God, and although eventually acknowledging that someone might be reading the book[3], continues to talk to God alone. This has an unnerving effect on the reader. As O'Donnell says, it "can give rise to the rather disconcerting feeling of coming into a room and chancing upon a man speaking to someone who isn't there."[4].

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[1] Augustine. *Confessions* 1. 1. 1.

[2] This commonly-used term appears first in Horace's *Ars Poetica* 148. Horace describes the poetry of Homer as beginning *in medias res* - but, of course, Horace uses the term to refer to a story that begins halfway through *events*, rather than halfway through the story itself - in Homer, the normal introductions and preambles are given. On the other hand, The Confessions, although not unique (See Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*, for example) opens truly *in medias res*, since it drops the reader into the middle of the action with no explanation.

[3] Finally mentioned in Confessions 2. 3. 5.

[4] O'Donnell (1992), vol. 2, 9.

This is, my opinion, at the centre of Augustine's narrative strategy. We have seen how, in conversion narratives, there is normally an exemplary figure of some kind. The reader is expected to identify with and draw a lesson from the exemplar. The authors of conversion narratives have, we have seen, not so much told us what to do as shown us through the actions of a character whose actions are clearly meant to be an example to us, whether positive (Thaïs, for example) or negative (Lucius). Like all of the other conversion narratives in my study, Augustine's argument depends upon demonstration. Unlike Apuleius, who, in a work of fiction, can make his protagonist do anything he wants him to, therefore serving any narrative purpose at all, Augustine, whose narrative is limited by (an interpretation of) the events of his own life, often brings in other exemplary figures to illustrate his point. In doing so, Augustine takes a great deal of care to interweave these stories with his own and to emphasise their believability as examples of privileged information.

Augustine's abrupt introduction, while disconcerting, nevertheless serves the function of a more traditional programmatic introduction. The series of philosophical conundrums raised by the saint between 1. 1. 1 and the "official" start of the narrative at 1. 6. 7 is intended to be kept in mind as Augustine explores his own history in books 1-9, and then thinks about the nature of God, time, memory and creation in books 10-13. Augustine uses the unorthodox style of his beginning to impress upon the reader the themes of his story in a far more persuasive manner than a simple statement of intent. In catching the reader off-guard, Augustine works to cause the reader to become susceptible to thinking along Augustine's lines.

So, if we return to *Confessions* 1. 1. 1, we see that the text begins with a meditation on the praise of God.

> magnus es domine et laudabilis ualde... et laudare te uult homo aliqua portio creaturae tuae...
>
> Lord, you are great, and very much to be praised... And a man, a tiny piece of that which you have created, wishes to praise you.[5]

In these first few words, Augustine establishes the ostensible purpose of his entire narrative - the promotion of the worship of God - and, more importantly, to whom his narrative will be addressed. The inclusion of God Himself as a narratee proves somewhat problematic for both critic and reader; this will be discussed in due course.

Augustine develops his programmatic statement thus: a reason that God should be worshipped is that God desires to be worshipped[6]. This is, Augustine realises, paradoxical. Augustine then asks a number of questions: if God inspires man to worship Him, does man come to know God through the act of worship? In worship, Augustine reasons, one calls on God, but how can one know God if one has not called on Him first? How can one call on God without first knowing God? This chicken-and-egg situation, Augustine reasons, is solved by the introduction of an outside factor:

> quomodo autem inuocabunt, in quem non crediderunt? aut quomodo crediderunt sine praedicante?
>
> How can they call him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without preaching?[7]

That is, we are brought to worship God and call on God through the ministry of a preacher. Again, this is programmatic. If Augustine's text is calculated to inspire the

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[5] *Confessions* 1. 1. 1, again.
[6] *tu excitas ut laudare te delectet* (you rouse [man], that he takes pleasure in praising you), *ibid.*
[7] *Confessions* 1. 1. 1; a direct quote from the Old Latin translation of *Romans* 10: 14.

worship of God, then, although he appears not to be addressing his reader[8], Augustine takes on the role of the preacher.

How can they believe without preaching? In discussing Augustine's rhetorical question, one inevitably needs to ask whether or not what Augustine is doing is preaching, as such. Stock (1996) argues that the Christian Empire in Augustine's period had undergone an intellectual and spiritual sea-change, creating a reading culture which began to overshadow other forms of understanding[9]. It occurs to me that if 'reading' had indeed become so important, other forms of interpretation (for example, listening to a saint's own narrative, like Elder Zosimas in *VSMAM*, or watching a baby like Augustine[10]) might actually represent more than just the bare act of understanding, working as a semiotic code for reading.

Augustine continues, in the following chapter, by asking several more questions. He asks how one might be brought to a point where one would *want* to call on God. He asks how does one call on God - for example, what is the point of asking God to come to oneself if God is already omnipresent? From omnipresence, Augustine moves on to the nature of God's omnipresence, and from there to the very nature of God Himself[11]. This too proves to be programmatic. The plot of the Confessions, therefore, is prefaced and shown to be interconnected: the autobiographical narrative of books 1-9 is prefaced by 1. 1. 1 - 1. 2. 2; this progresses to the theological, abstract narrative of books 10-13, prefaced by 1. 3. 3 - 1. 4. 4.

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[8] Or, perhaps paradoxically, all the more *because* he is not directly addressing his reader.
[9] Stock (1996), 12.
[10] *Confessions* 1. 6. 8.

Eventually, Augustine steers the text towards the beginning of the narrative proper:

> quid enim est quod uolo dicere domine nisi quia nescio unde uenerim huc in istam dico uitam mortalem an mortem uitalem?
>
> What else is there I want to say to you, Lord. Other than I don't know where i came from into what I might call this mortal life - or this living death?[12]

The questions Augustine asks are rhetorical; although presented as if they are problematic for Augustine the narrator, they are there in order to be answered later in the text. The reader is never directly asked these questions. God is asked; the reader is witness to the asking. We are never addressed directly. But Augustine's long list of questions must be for the benefit of the reader. Augustine knows the answers (or has plausible answers to his questions), since they inform and drive the rest of the work; God also knows the answers, since, by definition, knowing the answers is a perquisite of omniscience.

Having established God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, Augustine's choice of God as textual narratee appears, at first glance, to be an odd one. With God's attributes so clearly defined, It seems almost pointless for Augustine to be talking to Him at all.

> cui narro haec? neque enim tibi deus meus sed apud te narro haec generi meo generi humano quantulacumque ex particula incidere potest in istas meas litteras. et ut quid hoc? ut uidelicet ego et quisquis haec legit cogitemus de quam profundo clamandum sit ad te.
>
> To whom do I relate these things? Not to you, my God, but before you I tell this to my race, to the human race, or at least the miniscule part of it that might come across my writing. And why am I talking about this? It is in order that I - or anyone else who reads this - might be able to consider the great depths from which we must cry to you.[13]

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[11] *Confessions* 1. 3. 3-1. 4. 4.
[12] *Confessions* 1. 6. 7.
[13] *Confessions* 2. 3. 5.

Augustine has to come clean here. God is manifestly not the direct target of Augustine's speech, although still the narratee - i.e. Augustine is speaking *to* God, but his confession is not for God's *benefit*. Of course, even though Augustine is speaking for our benefit, thus momentarily destroying the (fragile) illusion of unawareness of the reader's existence, Augustine is still quite able to maintain the "illusion" of honesty, since, when speaking to a (silent) interlocutor who already knows the truth, he has no reason to lie.

Augustine's speaking to God for our benefit is a theatrical conceit, and, as will be discussed in due course, Augustine has a great deal to say about theatre.

iii. 2. "the pleasant'st angling"

> BENEDICK (*coming forward*): This can be no trick The confidence was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady... it seems her affections have full bent.[14]

In Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*, two characters - Benedick and Beatrice - are tricked into admitting their true feelings for one another by a group of friends, who create a situation where their respective conversations will be overheard by their victims. Because Benedick and Beatrice are both tricked into believing that their friends do not know that they are there, they conclude that they have no reason to lie - the information is believed to be privileged precisely because Benedick and Beatrice believe that they are not supposed to be hearing their friends' conversations.

Compare this with:

> quam uehementi et acri dolore indignabar manichaeis et miserabar eos rursus quod illa sacramenta illa medicamenta nescirent et insani essent aduersus antidotum quo sani esse potuissent. uellem ut alicubi iuxta essent tunc et me nesciente quod ibi essent intuerentur faciem meam et audirent uoces meas quando legi quartum psalmum in illo tunc otio... audirent ignorante me utrum audirent ne me propter se illa dicere putarent quae inter haec uerba dixerim quia et re uera nec ea dicerem nec sic ea dicerem si me ab eis audiri uiderique sentirem nec si dicerem sic acciperent quomodo mecum et mihi coram te de familiari affectu animi mei.
>
> I felt terribly, bitterly angry towards the Manichees, but then I pitied them again, because they did not know about their cure, the sacraments. They were sick, opposed to the antidote which could have made them healthy. And I wished that they could be present without me knowing that they were near, so they could see my face and hear my voice as I read the fourth Psalm in that quiet time... with me unaware that they were listening, so that they would not think that I was saying these things for their sake. I wanted them to hear what I said about those words. Because, to tell the truth, I would not have said those things, or even said them in that way if I thought that that they could hear or see me. Even if I had said them, they wouldn't have accepted that what I said in your presence was what I thought about myself and communicated to myself.[15]

This is, of course, by no means a programmatic statement for the *Confessions*. However, it demonstrates that Augustine does know that information gained by

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[14] Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, II.iii.216ff.
[15] *Confessions* 9. 4. 8.

eavesdropping (to which I shall refer from this point as "unintentional" information) is more likely to be regarded as trustworthy, since, logically, a person cannot lie to someone she does not know is there.

It is quite reasonable to assume that Augustine is aware of the effect that his own narrative has on the reader, and that the text is designed so as to have the appearance of unintentional information. Augustine's insistence on addressing God, even when the reader is mentioned, creates in the reader a sense that Augustine is somehow not aware of their presence. This, in turn, has the *intention* of creating in the reader O'Donnell's "disconcerting feeling", thus attempting to make the reader feel that the information Augustine imparts is unintentional information.

Augustine begins his autobiography with a discussion of his childhood, which depends upon the thesis that small children are as much sinners as adults:

> quis me commemorat peccatum infantiae meae quoniam nemo mundus a peccato coram te nec infans cuius est unius diei uita super terram?
>
> Who reminds me of the sins of my infancy, since no one in the whole world is free of sin before You, not even a baby born into the world only one day since?[16]

Since, like most people, Augustine doesn't remember being a child, he depends upon information gleaned from his parents and his former nurses, and upon observation of children in the present day.

> tales esse infantes didici quos discere potui et me talem fuisse magis mihi ipsi indicauerunt nescientes quam scientes nutritores meae.
>
> This is what I have learned from those of whom I could learn - and that I was like that, too. Although they don't know, they have shown me more than my nurses with all their knowledge.[17]

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[16] *Confessions* 1. 7. 11.
[17] *Confessions* 1. 6. 8.

Augustine instinctively favours the information gleaned from observation of the young above that told him second-hand, for, it seems, two reasons: that babies, being babies, have no reason to tell Augustine what he wants to hear, no reason to deceive him, and are not even aware that he observes them.

Augustine's argument operates on both kinds of the privileged information with which Augustine builds his narrative, unintentional information and information which does not depend on Augustine: the information gleaned from his observations is reliable because it comes from subjects who are unaware; the information is reliable because it is empirically gained from observation, and (Augustine would like us to believe that it) does not depend upon Augustine's own opinion[18].

Both of the above examples constitute, in my opinion, broad hints, directing the reader to fall for a kind of narrative sleight-of-hand: to consider, even subconsciously, that if an unknowing subject's evidence is more reliable, and if Augustine, talking to God, is therefore seemingly unaware of the reader's presence, then Augustine's whole narrative must be more reliable than it would be if he were giving it to the reader "straight".

This is, of course, a very fragile state of understanding. Augustine's text, while ostensibly factual, has many of the aspects of a work of fiction and depends upon the reader's willing suspension of disbelief to succeed. Augustine supplies the tools, while the reader is the ultimate arbiter of whether Augustine's strategy stands or fails.

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[18] Augustine again expresses concerns about not being believed in 10. 3. 3. See Clark (1993), 54.

As narrator, narratee and narrated at this point (i.e. as the man who tells us that he has seen the actions of children - thus also being in a sense narrated *to* - and the man who saw at sometime in the past the actions of children), Augustine holds something of a privileged place in his own narrative. The children serve as an example for Augustine: he knows that babies exhibit the characteristics of original sin because he has seen them.

But the narrated Augustine himself also stands as an example, this time for us: he is evidence that the act of drawing evidence from things observed and applying it to oneself is a useful exercise; this is precisely what Augustine intends the reader to do as his narrative progresses. We have, in a nutshell, the use of example *as its own example,* and in this respect, the narrated Augustine serves the same role as Father Zosimas in *VSMAM.*

Not only is this incident useful to us as the beginning of a life, using evidence drawn from beyond the scope of the narrator's memory, it is again useful to us as a programmatic statement of how best to react to Augustine's text.

Augustine's intention is, as with all our authors of conversion narrative, to bring our understanding of the text to operate in such as way as to be receptive to his use of evidence. Since Augustine is unable to place us in a position where we see the evidence he wants us to see for ourselves in any literal sense, and well aware that his own experience and worldview by no means represents a comprehensive life, he therefore

resorts to the next best thing: he populates his theatrical act of prayer with actors whose stories are intended as third-person moral exemplars[19].

Often, these actors are versions of Augustine himself in former phases of his life: the boy scrumping pears from the local orchard[20], the shy student too scared either to stand up to the 'Wreckers' or fully to join them[21], the young man taken in by the smooth talk and fine manuscripts of the Manicheans[22], right down to the public orator reduced to tears in a Milan garden by the conviction of his own sin and saved by the grace of God[23].

Often, the actors are others whose stories are told by Augustine for the same reasons: Alypius, Victorinus[24], Nebridius and Augustine's mother are given as snapshots of things that Augustine finds himself unable to portray in and of himself. And, conversely, Augustine also uses characters to demonstrate error, for example the personable but intellectually unimpressive Manichee bishop Faustus[25]. All of these stories serve the same purpose in the text as Augustine himself. They are there, in the same way that characters such as Clement, Thaïs, Pelagia, Mary of Egypt and Zosimas are there: in

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[19] Stock (1996), 16, considers that the *Confessions* are part of a "process of self-redefinition... final publication, to extend the metaphor, is endlessly postponed, and this too is intentional". Stock here considers the fluid nature of the *Confessions*' text to be indicative of a dialogue between Augustine the narrator, Augustine the narratee, and Augustine the narrated, on the one hand, with God and the reader on the other. I would argue that the theatrical nature of Augustine's text underlines this, and adds to the sense of performance in Augustine's narrative.

[20] *Confessions* 2. 4. 9ff. Clark (1993), 67 suggests that the conversion under a fig tree might parallel Augustine's youthful theft of fruit, this symbolising a decisive break with his past life.

[21] *Confessions* 3. 3. 6.

[22] *Confessions* 3. 6. 10ff.

[23] *Confessions* 8. 12. 28ff.

[24] Stock (1996), 91-4 sees - in my opinion, quite rightly - Victorinus as a foreshadowing and parallel of Augustine's final conversion.

[25] *Confessions* 5. 3. 3; 5. 6. 10 - 5. 7. 12. See Stock (1996), 53 for further discussion of Augustine's portrayal of Faustus.

order to teach by example. They are narrative vessels through whom the reader might see Augustine's truth.

The arc of Alypius' story, for the most part, serves as a prime example of how Augustine might wish his story to be read.

> sed enim de memoria mihi lapsum erat cum illo ne uanorum ludorum caeco et praecipiti studio tam bonum iterimeret ingenium. uerum autem domine tu qui praesides gubernaculis omnium quae creasti non eum oblitus eras futurum inter filios tuos antistitem sacramenti tui et ut aperte tibi tribueretur eius correctio per me quidem illam sed nescientem operatus es... quam dum exponerem et opportune mihi adhibenda uideretur similitudo circensium quo illud quod insinuabam et iucundius et planius fieret cum inrisione mordaci eorum quos illa captiuasset insania scis tu deus noster quod tunc de Alypio ab illa peste sanando non cogitauerim. at ille in se rapuit meque illud non nisi propter se dixisse credidisset et quod alius acciperet ad suscensendum mihi accepit honestus adulescens ad suscensendum sibi et ad me ardentius diligendum.
>
> But I had forgotten to have a chat with him in order to convince him not to ruin such excellent potential with blind and headlong submission to the empty Games. In fact, you, Lord, who rule over the direction of everything which you have created, had not forgotten him. You planned it so that, out of all your children he would stand out as a minister of your sacrament, and the correction of his life - even though effected through me, unawares - should plainly be attributed to you... While expounding a text which happened to be in my hands, it seemed useful to draw an analogy from the Circus, which I used to make my point clear - to make my point clearer still, and more agreeable, I expressed it with sharp derision directed at those snared by this madness. You know, our God, that right then I had no thought of rescuing Alypius from his disease. But he took it in, and not only believed that I'd said it for his benefit, but this noble youth also took what anyone else would have seen as reason to be angry with me, took it as a reason to be angry with himself, and as a reason for admiring me all the more ardently.[26]

Here, Augustine describes how, having previously expressed his disapproval of Alypius' enthusiasm for gladiatorial games, completely without thinking, exerts his influence over Alypius, causing him to - at least for a while - give them up.

Augustine's words are unintentional; Alypius takes them to heart anyway and modifies his behaviour. Augustine's words are unintentional, but still have their effect, and the implication is that their effect is all the greater because they are unintentional; that,

Augustine, forgetting that Alypius even had a problem, had no reason to be anything other than honest. Alypius (who, one would imagine, would at least be known by reputation to a Christian reader)[27] serves as an example to take good advice, however it is intended; the reader, raising the possible objection that Augustine could not know what his own problem is, is encouraged to apply the moral of Augustine's text to his own[28].

It is interesting to note that Alypius' story does not end neatly; he falls into his besetting sin again and needs to repent a second time. While able to use the stories of his friends' lives to good effect, Augustine is unable to escape the facts.

Augustine encourages a 'reading' of his words which transforms and brings the hearer closer to God; the act of paying attention to truths spoken, even truths spoken unawares transforms and changes.

Augustine's preconversion experience of Cicero's now lost *Hortensius* is a case in point: Augustine is brought to think about the Christian God by the reading of a pagan text[29].

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[26] *Confessions* 6. 7. 12.

[27] By the time that Augustine wrote the *Confessions* (AD 397-401), Alypius was Bishop of Thagaste.

[28] See Stock (1996), 81: "The fact that Augustine has let his plan for correcting his protégé slip from his mind can be viewed as a silent, critical commentary on the narrative in which he has just taken part."

[29] It is interesting that Augustine says little, if anything, about the contents of the *Hortensius*, other than that it contains "an exhortation to study philosophy". Stock puts it this way: "As we read the brief account, we are transported from the writings, *illae litterae*, to the love of wisdom, *amor sapientiae*, without any intervening steps. Reading is not a cause of conversion, it is a new *symbol* of conversion" (*id.* [1996], 39). But the *Hortensius* is, at most, a conversion to philosophy, or, to be specific, the philosophical exploration of the divine, and as such is no more than a waystation on Augustine's journey towards Christianity. That the *Hortensius* did, in its own way, influence Augustine a great deal is undeniable, as shown in his reference to it in *Confessions* 8. 7. 18. See Brown (2000), 30, 100-101; C. Harrison (2000) 5-6, Chadwick (1986), 9-10. Clark (1993), 15 acknowledges Cicero's influence to such an extent as to suggest that Augustine may have actually converted to Christianity at this point.

> et usitato iam discendi ordine perueneram in librum cuiusdam Ciceronis cuius linguam fere omnes mirantur pectus non ita. sed liber ille ipsius exhortationem continet ad philosophium et uocatur Hortensius. ille uero liber mutauit affectum meum et ad te ipsum domine mutauit preces meas et uota ac desideria mea fecit alia.
>
> In the usual order of learning, I had come across a book by some Cicero, at whose tongue almost everyone wonders... but not at his heart. But this book of his contains an exhortation to study philosophy and is called *Hortensius*. That book changed my feelings, and altered my prayers, Lord, so that they were directed to You, Yourself; it made my desires and my priorities different.[30]

This foreshadows another conversion by reading, which in turn foreshadows and directly precedes Augustine's own conversion through reading. Here, two *agentes in rebus*[31] are introduced by Ponticianus to a copy of Athanasius' *Life of Antony*[32].

> sed illos uagabundos inruisse in quandam casam ubi habitabant quidam serui tui spiritu pauperes qualium est regnum caelorum et inuenisse ibi codicem in quo scripta erat uita Antonii. quam legere coepit unus eorum et mirari et accendi et inter legendum meditari arripere talem uitam et relicta militia saeculari servire tibi. erant autem ex eis quos dicunt agentes in rebus. tum subito repletus amore sancto et sobrio pudore iratus sibi coniecit oculos in amicum et ait illi dic quaeso te omnibus istis laborious nostris quo ambimus pervinire?
>
> But, in their wanderings they entered a certain house in which were living some of your servants, poor in spirit - for of such is the kingdom of Heaven. There they found a book in which was written the *Life of Antony*. One of them began to read it, and was filled with wonder, and burned with anger against himself, and, while still reading, decided to take up this way of life and give up his post in the government to be your servant. You see, they were both agents of the Home Office. Suddenly, he was filled with holy love and sober shame.. he turned his eyes towards his friend and said, "I ask of you: what do we hope to achieve with all of our labours?"[33]

The two men decide on the spot to give up their worldly positions and adopt the ascetic lifestyle, through reading the life of a saint. The story of Antony is not summarised in Augustine's text; presumably he expects his reader to be aware of it[34]. Here we have an example of a person being converted or transformed directly though exposure to the life of a saint (a situation which would be echoed - although not as subtly - in Zosimas' response to the narrative of Mary of Egypt). Antony's influence on

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[30] *Confessions* 3. 4. 7.
[31] The hated 'secret police' of the later Empire. See *OCD* 39.
[32] See p 39 above.
[33] *Confessions* 8. 6. 15.
[34] Meyer (1950), 14 discusses the ubiquity of the *Vita Antonii*.

these men is vast, and the implication that this is a good thing leads one inevitably to the conclusion that Augustine desires a response to his own text[35].

The narrative of Augustine's own conversion is, of course, Augustine's trump card. Reduced to tears in a garden in Milan by his own failure to resolve his spiritual difficulties, Augustine, at the edge of despair and tormented by a personified vision of the Chastity he feels unable to claim for his own, hears the voice of a child intone the words *tolle, lege* ("pick up, read")[36]. He picks up the copy of *Romans,* and, inspired by the first section he reads (*Romans* 13: 13-14), he immediately mends his ways.

Here, Augustine is influenced both by an unprejudiced (and possibly completely oblivious) voice, and by the reading of a book.

> ...amplius diligat quia per quem me uidet tantis peccatorum meorum languoribus exui per eum se uidet tantis peccatorum languoribus non implicari.
>
> ... (the one who is aware of his faults) loves all the more because the One through whom he sees that I was delivered from the terrible sickness of my sins is the One through whom he see that he himself is not caught in a similarly great sickness of sin.[37]

Per quem me uidet: through whom one sees. *Per quem exui:* through whom I was delivered. The reader is invited to see the truth (i.e. Augustine's take on the truth) by the agency of God Himself, working through the text, bringing the exemplar to life in the heart of the reader. The text becomes a drama, a piece of active theatre intended to transform its reader by her identification with any or all of the narrated characters[38].

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[35] Stock (1996), 100ff, deconstructs the conversion of the *agentes* act by act. *ibid,* 82: "But here, ironically, Alypius is a stand in for an inadequate Augustine and his head of rhetoric is an inadequate replacement for the Bishop of Milan."

[36] *Confessions* 8. 12. 29.

[37] *Confessions* 2. 7. 15.

[38] Inasmuch as while the reader is often encouraged to identify with Augustine, it is with Augustine as narrated character, and not as narrator.

Paradoxically, the *Confessions* thus engage with the reader. The reader becomes a participant in the narrative, and yet is distanced and forced to the sidelines at the same time. The reader becomes both participant and audience.

iii. 3. theatre and pathos

The very idea of "confession" supports the idea of a theatrical performance, for confession is spoken. The force of the word *confiteor* (the perfect participle of which, *confessus*, gives us the noun *confessio*, hence the plural title *Confessiones*) is primarily vocal, derived from *fateor* (I admit) with the emphatic prefix *con-*[39]. Augustine himself once wrote of one of his other works that it worked best if spoken aloud[40].

At the beginning of *Confessions* 3, Augustine begins an account of how, as a young man, he came to Carthage to continue his education. One of the first things that he mentions as being important to him at the time is the theatre. As a narrator, he finds the whole question of drama problematic:

> quid est, quod ibi homo uult dolere cum spectat luctuosa et tragica, quae tamen pati ipse nollet? et tamen pati uult ex eis dolorem spectator et dolor ipse est uoluptas eius. quid est nisi mirabilis insania?
>
> What does it mean when a man wants, for example, to feel sorrow when he watches tragic and grievous things which he, on the other hand, doesn't want to go though himself? And yet, he wants to suffer as the audience of these miseries, and the pain itself is his delight. What is this if it isn't utterly insane?[41]

Augustine the narrator, despite his current low opinion of tragic theatre, still recognises, however, that the former Augustine - the narrated Augustine - used to

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[39] See O'Donnell (1992), vol. 2, 4 for a brief discussion of the uses of *confiteor*.

[40] Augustine says in *Ep.* 10 1. 3 that his *De Musica* is better listened to than read. See also a discussion of this in O'Donnell (1992), vol. 2, 345. See also Stock (1996), 41, where Stock stresses that the *oral/aural* experience of Cicero's *Hortensius* was vital to the process of Augustine's conversion.

enjoy these things, so there must be some reason for this enjoyment. In the same chapter, Augustine continues thus:

> ...cum ipse patitur, miseria, cum aliis compatitur, misericordia dici solet. sed qualis tandem misericordia in rebus fictis et scenicis?
>
> When he himself suffers, that's misery. When he suffers for others, we call that pity. But what sort of pity is it when it's for something contrived, something made up?[42]

In theatre, Augustine reasons that we are invited to grieve alongside those who fictionally suffer on the stage. Augustine draws a distinction between misery for the self and grief on behalf of another, embodied in sympathy or compassion; this he calls *misericordia*, which we can translate as "pity", or "mercy". While Augustine considers *misericordia* to be good, he finds it ridiculous that anyone *wants* to feel pity, any more than they do misery:

> an cum miserum esse neminem libeat libet tamen esse misericordem quod quia non sine dolore est hac una causa amantur dolores?
>
> Could it be that while nobody wants to be miserable, they do want to feel pity, which can't exist without pain? Is that the only reason why sufferings are loved?[43]

Augustine reasons that pity is a product of love:

> et hoc de illa uena amicitiae est. sed quo uadit?
>
> And this comes from the very stream of friendship. But where does it go?[44]

...while at the same time questioning the authenticity of the pity one feels for a fictional character. Whither, Augustine asks, is pity directed if its object is not real? Augustine concludes that this kind of pity is misdirected, and therefore essentially immoral:

> ut quid decurrit in torrentem picis bullientis aestus inmanes taetrarum libidinum in quos mutatur et uertitur per nutum proprium de caelesti serenitate detorta atque deiecta?
>
> Why does it run down into rapids of boiling pitch, into the terrible heat of hell-born desires into which it is transformed, perverted by its own consent, twisted and cast down from heavenly serenity?[45]

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[41] *Confessions* 3. 2. 2.
[42] *op. cit.*
[43] *Confessions* 3. 2. 3.
[44] *op. cit.*

This discussion is, of course, found in the centre of a story. And while Augustine goes out of his way to involve the reader in his book, he continually makes it *as difficult as he possibly can* for the reader to simply draw pleasure from his book as if it were simply a fiction. While Augustine has explicitly stated that theatre (and, by extension, fiction) is essentially mendacious, he at the same time implies that his own story is *not* one of these fictions[46]. Augustine, in critically examining fictions in this way, distances his own text from fiction. His examination of theatrical tragedy is included *by way of contrast* with the "true" tragedies he himself narrates.

Augustine repeatedly tries to make the reader feel pity for his tragic, unsaved state - and the wanderings of others - but makes it clear that the characters in his work are real, and as such deserve the "real", honest expression of *misericordia.*

This in itself requires no small amount of persuasion for the reader, for, while Augustine desires the reader to show *misericordia* towards his characters, it is often the case that the only way in which they deserve *misericordia* is because they don't know they deserve it. For example:

> ubi ergo mihi tunc eras et quam longe? et longe peregrinabar abs te exclusus et a siliquis porcorum, quos de siliquis pascebam.
>
> For where were you, but far away from me? And far I journeyed from you, even kept from the husks of the pigs whom I was feeding with husks.[47]

Augustine here narrates his early career among the Manichaeans. He compares himself with the Prodigal Son[48], but places himself in a worse position still. While the Prodigal has the option of eating some of his pigs' food, Augustine feels that he was excluded

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[45] *op. cit.*
[46] See Stock (1996), 36.
[47] *Confessions* 3. 6. 11.

even from this. For Augustine, here, food is the Christian scripture; the husks represent the pagan literature his younger self taught. The narrated Augustine, barred from drawing spiritual nourishment even from the classics, is confined to gaining his teaching from Manichean texts, which, to Augustine the narrator, amount to no food at all.

Thus, even while we know that the narrated Augustine of the past would not have considered himself pitiful, the present narrating Augustine does, and makes sure that the reader is aware of this.

> cum enim laboraret ille febribus iacuit diu sine sensu in sudore laetali et cum desperaretur baptizatus est nesciens me non curante et praesumante id retinere potius animam eius quod a me acceperat non quod in nescientis corpore fiebat. longe autem aliter erat.
>
> For, when he laboured under the fever, and lay comatose for a long time in a sweat, and when they finally despaired of him, he was baptised without his knowledge. I didn't care; I presumed that his spirit would remember what it had received from me, not what his body had received while he was unaware. The opposite proved to be the case.[49]

Augustine's friend ultimately is to die, but not without first returning to consciousness and owning the Catholic faith.

The grief the narrated Augustine feels for his friend's death is the reason for his suffering, and part of the reason why the reader is invited to pity him; both narrator Augustine and narrated Augustine agree on this. What they disagree on is the *quality* of the suffering that narrated Augustine undergoes. While narrated Augustine is only aware of his grief for the death of his friend, narrator Augustine attributes the magnitude of his counterpart's grief to his erroneous (Manichaean) beliefs, and his lack of faith in the Christian God, thus:

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[48] *Luke* 15.
[49] *Confessions* 4. 4. 8.

> factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio et interrogabam animam meam quare tristis esset et quare conturbaret me ualde et nihil nouerat respondere mihi. et si dicebam spera in deum iuste non obtemperabat quia uerior erat et melior homo, quem carissimum amiserat, quam phantasma in quod sperare iubebatur.
>
> I became to myself a huge question, and I asked my soul, why was it sad? Why did it so distress me? But my soul did not know how to reply. And if I had said to my soul, "trust in God," it would have rightly disobeyed. For the very dear friend whom I had lost was a more trusty and better man than the phantom in whom I was ordering my soul to trust.[50]

Not only has Augustine used his past self's experiences to invite the reader's *misericordia,* but he has even gone so far as to modify it to suit his thesis, hence, while the younger, *narrated* Augustine considers his grief virtually unbearable, the older *narrating* Augustine adds an extra level of pathos by suggesting that if only his younger self knew what he knows now, things would not have been so awful for him.

Similarly, in the scene where Augustine compares himself as a boy to that classical archvillain, Catiline[51], simply because he used to steal pears from the orchard, Augustine plays up the awfulness of his former self's crimes - concentrating more on the idea of the crime, on the fact that the theft of pears was less to do with actually wanting to eat a pear, and more to do with doing it for the thrill of it alone.

In all these cases, Augustine is using the paraphernalia of drama to manipulate the emotions of the reader, and to encourage him/her to feel pity for him in his spiritual wandering. At the same time, he is denying that he has done so - notwithstanding the theatrical style of his narrative, Augustine implicitly insists that the flow of friendship from which the reader's sympathy is drawn is not corrupted, that the pity one feels for

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[50] *Confessions* 4. 4. 9.
[51] *Confessions* 2. 5. 10ff.

the narrated Augustine is genuine, regardless of the tactics he uses to elicit this sympathy.

iii. 4. more conclusions

Inasmuch as Augustine seeks to put across his argument in the most persuasive terms he can, Augustine's is an evangelistic narrative. The efficacy of an evangelistic narrative is, of course, only really as good as the belief - or suspended disbelief - of the reader, who, of course, can choose to put the book down at any moment. While the relatively simple narratives of the prostitute-saints' conversions simply show the reader the sequence of events with a more or less obvious underlying agenda, the option is still left to the reader to reject it outright. Apuleius deals with this by creating a narrative full of twists and turns, of hints and signs, which, although in retrospect lead to one conclusion, are, without prior knowledge, ambiguous enough for Lucius' conversion to be as much a surprise to the reader as it is to Lucius himself. Apuleius attempts to side-step the disbelief of the reader by withholding important information - such as the true nature of Lucius' narrative, thus eventually forcing the reader into a kind of epistemological conversion, made helpless to avoid it by the very act of reading the text.

Augustine, on the other hand, as we shall see, eschews the twisty deceptions of the Metamorphoses, preferring instead to be more or less open with his religious agenda. Instead, he creates an atmosphere where the reader feels that he has access to privileged information, that is, information which is more believable than that told directly to the reader.

This 'privileged' information falls into two rough categories: information which is more trustworthy because the narrator of said information is shown to be having no reason to be lying, and information which is more trustworthy because it is drawn from a source other than the narrator.

Augustine goes out of his way to repeatedly affirm that he has no reason to lie at any point in his text, which informs the narrative of the first nine books of the *Confessions* in a profound way.

Augustine, not above adopting the trappings of tragic theatre - or the "moral exemplars" of simpler conversion narratives - is at pains to ensure that the reader is convinced of the veracity of his account, and is intellectually, as well as emotionally primed to accept Augustine's message, embodied in the final four books of the *Confessions*[52].

[52] Chadwick (1987), 68.

object lessons

Having discussed in varying degrees of depth the representation of conversion in these six narratives, it only remains to summarise my findings and to draw some general conclusions.

The *Recognitions* of Clement represent a problem: how does one communicate an heretical idea to coreligionists who are not part of one's own sect? The solution for the author of the Pseudo-Clementine Narrative is to place one's own words into the mouths of highly respected fathers of the church. Clement and Peter were already of unimpeachable character. The example is of Clement, second Bishop of Rome, who converts to Christianity and hangs on every words of his mentor, the Apostle Peter - as he should, and as the reader is intended to as well. Clement's example is there to be followed[1] - actual events in the text are subordinate to its true agenda, the teaching of a theology quite markedly different from that propagated by other Christians.

The tales of the three prostitutes from *Vitae Patrum* I are, although still relatively simple, of varying complexity, and while they share a common theme (namely the conversion of a sinful woman to Christianity and to the eremitic lifestyle), they use this theme to varying ends. As the genre-within-a-genre that the three Prostitute Saints represent developed over time, it showed a development of sorts, from the simple, bald telling of the story of

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[1] See p 32 above.

Thaïs, to the romantic fictions of the story of Pelagia, to the notional "meta-hagiography" represented by the story of Mary of Egypt. Still, it would be wrong to say conclusively that the hagiographies of the prostitute saints necessarily developed in complexity over time; in the context of the other stories of the *Vitae Patrum*, it can be seen that complexity is not necessarily tied to a date of composition, nor - as one could infer by the exponential increase in signs and wonders in the three stories - is the amount of fantastical fiction contained in a given hagiography[2]. If anything, the stories of Pelagia, Mary of Egypt and Thaïs represent to us the development of *a theme within hagiography,* rather than a development within hagiography itself, and if these things reflect anything, they simply reflect the talent and imagination of the writers of the three hagiographies, and the diversity of their respective target audiences.

But all three stories depend upon example to drive their point home, whether it be the example of Thaïs' instant penitence[3], of Pelagia's willing salvation[4] through change of gender[5], or of the rapt attention of Elder Zosimas to Mary the former prostitute's story[6].

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[2] It is fair to say that the earliest popular hagiography, Athanasius' *Life of Antony* is, in this writer's opinion of equal length and complexity - and has at least the same number of miracles - as *VSPM,* if not *VSMAM;* Jerome's *Life of Paul the First Hermit,* with its subtext of spiritual oneupmanship (it having been written, presumably, to trump Athanasius' original story), also plays interesting games with the reader. Both *Paul* and *Antony* predate *VSTM.*

[3] See p 45 above.

[4] See pp 56-7 above.

[5] Reminiscent, perhaps, of the Gnostic *Sayings Gospel of Thomas,* 115: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.'" (Jesus Seminar Scholars' Translation).

[6] See pp 72-3 above.

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the narrator's conversion is the surprise climax to a long, funny and frequently scatological tale of a man's misfortunes in a world gone slightly wrong. The reader here is swept along with the strange disconnections and dysfunctions in Lucius' world; Lucius' example is a different one to the simple "monkey see, monkey do" philosophy of the *Recognitions* or of the hagiographies, inasmuch as Lucius is as often (or more often) a bad example than a good one - although, as we have seen, Apuleius is careful to make sure that we follow Lucius the good example before Lucius the Bad Example appears to us[7]. In the end, the example we follow is that of the close companion whose experiences - and surprises - we share. We share the experiences of Lucius, and by the time that Lucius' experiences diverge from our own and he becomes complicit in his world, the deed has already been done and we have been made to experience a bizarre epistemological conversion to the mysteries of the text[8].

That Augustine was aware of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and any number of hagiographies is undeniable[9]; but Augustine's own conversion is represented in a completely different manner.

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[7] See pp 83-4 above.

[8] See p 131 above.

[9] Augustine's conversion is influenced, of course, by a story about the reading of the *Life of Antony*, in *Confessions* 8. 6. 15; he also tells of the finding of the remains of Protasius and Gervasius at 9. 7. 16. Both of these accounts of saints omit any retelling of the saints' story, which suggests that Augustine considers them to be common knowledge. It stands to reason that if the lives of relatively obscure saints like the two martyrs of Milan are well known to Augustine, then Augustine must be aware of at least the stories of Antony, Protasius and Gervasius, and probably more. Since Thaïs is traditionally supposed to have died roughly about the time of Augustine's birth, there is a possibility that *VSTM* or an earlier version of it may have been known to Augustine. See also *City of God*, 8. 14.

While the *Metamorphoses* ends with a conversion, Augustine's *Confessions* is a book about a conversion. The conversion is not just the central event in the plot, it *is* the plot. The reader knows that Augustine converted to Christianity from the beginning; Augustine not only depends upon example, but wraps up his account in a complex and unsettling framing device. The reader is, to a degree, fooled into imagining that one is eavesdropping on the saint as he communicates with his God; that this is intentional is confirmed by the instances where honest words spoken unawares are given an authoritative veneer of truth[10]. Augustine's second tactic is to depend not only upon his own evidence, but also to depend upon those whom he deems to be authoritative in their opinions, a tactic used liberally in his narrative.

The use of example is held in common by all of these conversion narratives in some form or another, but it is used in different ways, and used *independently.* Likewise, while the narrative of conversion seems from my sample to be invariably evangelistic in some form or another - whether extolling a Platonic spirituality, a Platonic Christianity developed through the act of reading, an Ebionite theology, or the transformation of a fallen woman in any of three distinct ways - the purpose of the narrative is variable.

It would be too simple to say that a narrative of conversion is intended to reproduce in the reader the experience that the narrator/protagonist is said to have undergone. Most of the texts would have been read by people who had already converted or who had always been

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[10] See p 138ff above.

in the religion. These narratives are not simply there to convert the reader to the author's religion - after all, most of them would have been read by the author's coreligionists - rather, they seek to convert to the reader to the *character* of the author's religion. While not existing in a vacuum, these stories had minimal - if any - influence on each others' representation of conversion - and the evangelistic purpose of its telling. This is a crucial point. By showing how conversion to a given way of seeing things makes a person's life - and the person him- or herself - better, it might be intended to confirm the reader's adherence to the religious sect in question (the hagiographies) or seek to poach someone from within the same religion to a particular expression of the same religion (the *Recognitions*). There is very little we can say to bring these stories together. But then, this is perhaps the entire point. The diversity of strategy and effect in these six texts leads us to question the assumption that there is such a thing as "Conversion Narrative" *per se*; there are only conversion narratives.

If anything, the consistent use of example and the evangelistic purpose of all of the conversion narratives studied here shows that in the world of Christianity's initial growth and eventual triumph, as in later centuries, that the most effective way to preach a sermon was to show rather than to tell; that the narrative of conversion could be a vehicle for virtually any religious or philosophical idea; and that perhaps the use of the narrative of religious conversion as an example of how to live - or how not to live - one's life was more than simply a literary movement, but in fact a characteristic of the religious and philosophical atmosphere of the centuries after Christ. Narratives of conversion do not constitute a genre because they *transcend* genre, and can be used in many ways for many

purposes. There are almost as many kinds of narrative of conversion as there are narratives of conversion; even the three very similar stories of the prostitute saints each draw from their tales a different moral.

Narratives of conversion represent a literary theme that has existed for a very long time, in many ways; in some ways, if we use the widest possible interpretation of conversion (as we have done), they are practically universal. In John Wesley's story, mentioned briefly at the beginning of this study, the narrative of religious conversion is a vehicle for an idea, a vehicle which uses example to drive its point home. Wesley's narrative is an example of a literary form which has existed practically unchanged for nearly two millennia. This form might be not only part of the heritage of two millennia of the Christian faith, but in fact representative of the way we in the West have thought and identified ourselves for over two millennia. This is, of course, an idea which, if true, means that this study is broader than a study of Classics or even a general study of narrative, but in fact a study of one of the fundamentals of Western thought.

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abbreviations

AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
GCN	*Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*
NJBC	*New Jerome Bible Commentary*
NPEA	*Der Neue Pauly Enzyklopäedie der Antike*
OCD^3	*Oxford Classical Dictionary, Third Edition*
PL	*Patrologia Latinae*
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
VSTM	*Vita Sanctae Thaïsis Meretricis*
VSPM	*Vita Sanctae Pelagiae Meretricis*
VSMAM	*Vita Sanctae Mariae Aegyptiacae Meretricis*

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